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CHRISTABEL KINGSCOTE.



"The tide was going out, and bearing on its bosom the stately ships. 'Could one be the *Silly!*' Christabel asked herself."—Page 53.

CHRISTABEL KINGSCOTE;

OR,

The Patience of Hope.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "VIOLET DOUGLAS," "THE OLD GATEWAY,"
"HELEN'S DIARY," ETC.

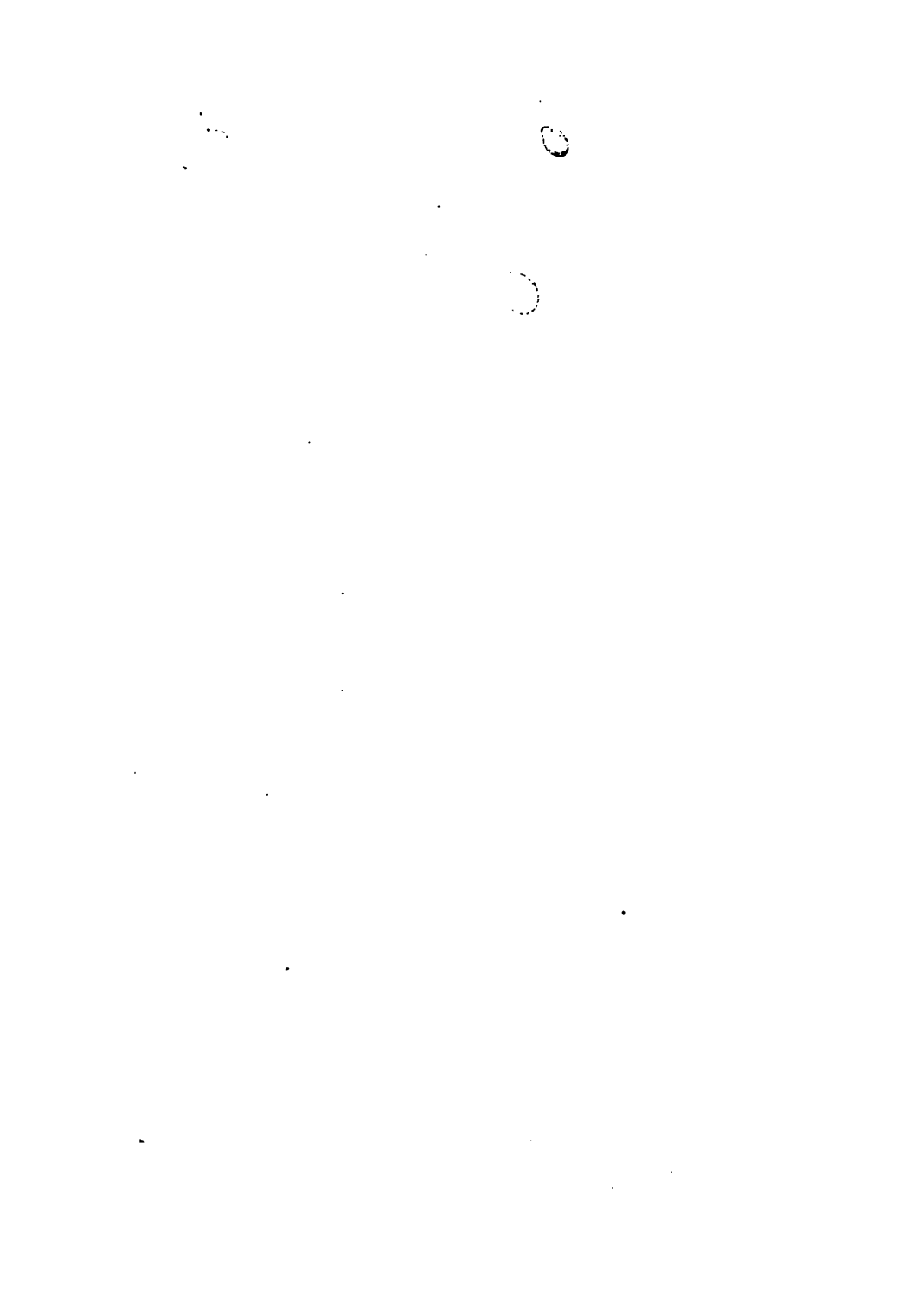
" Though the winds blow and billows roll,
Hope is the anchor of my soul;
It fastens on a Land unknown,
And moors me to my Father's Throne."



SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXX.

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CHRISTABEL KINGSCOTE.

CHAPTER I.

MORNING DEW.

"He always wins who sides with God,
To him no chance is lost ;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill ;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will."

FABER.

THERE was a sound of young voices under the windows of Heatherington House, not long after the sun was up, one bright May morning ; a morning jubilant with the song of birds, the trickling of waters, the hum of early bees ; a morning fragrant with the scent of flowers, from

lilacs and hawthorns, from wallflowers and honeysuckles, in the old-fashioned garden beds, which skirted the wide lawn where the children were gathered, evidently intent upon some grand scheme over which a great deal of consultation was necessary.

"Now look here, you girls," said the boy of thirteen, who was considered an oracle by his two sisters, "the dew is very heavy, and you will get your feet wringing wet. Look at your frock, Miss Alice, already!"

"That comes of promotion to long dresses," said Katie, with a triumphant glance at her own very short cotton frock, which had seen a good many immersions in the laundry, if faded colours may be taken as a sign of it. "I have not got any harm, Harold, have I? Now then, let us pull the thing. Alice and I will pull, and you shall guide. I am almost sorry to cut down the dear daisies; though it is great fun to have a mowing machine."

"I think it would be far better fun to have a proper gardener, as we once had," said Alice, as she gathered up the long lilac cotton gown, and tucked it into her band, preparatory to setting to work in a more languid fashion than the others. "Are you sure you had leave to have this machine, Harold? pray don't let it come to any harm, or what will papa say?"

"Harm!" said Harold, contemptuously. "I know what I am about. Now then!" and the

operation began, to the destruction of the daisies, which had flourished undisturbed for so many weeks, and to the destruction too of Katie's short frock, which somehow flapped under the roller, and gave way with a prolonged tear, which ended in a breadth of the faded print being utterly severed from the rest.

"Dear me! how horrid and tiresome! pull it out, Alice, or it will stop the machine. Oh, what a splendid smooth place we have made already! What will papa say when he sees the whole lawn mown before breakfast? and how pleased he will be with us!"

"Yes, and how pleased Christabel will be when she sees your frock, Katie," said Alice; "and mamma will say——"

"I know," interrupted Katie, "she will say there is no money to buy a new one; well, it can't be helped. Go on, go on, Harold." And then the three worked on, and the machine creaked, and the daisies' golden eyes looked no longer up to heaven, but lay in heaps earthward amongst the grass; and when the clock over the stables struck eight, a great deal more than half the lawn was mown—in somewhat irregular curves, it is true, and with here and there an awkward furrow, when Harold turned too sharp, or Katie and Alice tripped up. Still it was a good morning's work for three labourers of twelve, thirteen, and seventeen, respectively; and as they paused to admire the result of their

activity and industry, they surveyed it with pardonable pride.

Presently there was a shout of acclamation, as two little boys in holland suits, with rosy cheeks, and long flaxen hair, ran out from the door at the side of the house, and were followed by a girl rather above the middle height, with a bright pleasant face, and abundant golden hair gathered round her small head, and a figure supple and easy in every movement, who exclaimed in a tone of remonstrance, "Katie, Katie, what have you been doing? look at your frock! and Alice, I am sure your feet must be very wet. You have only thin boots on; do go in and change them directly. Harold, where did you get that machine?"

"Borrowed it from Frank Carey—of course, though the Careys are farmers, their garden is not the wilderness this is—and I intend to work at it and get it into order."

Christabel, the elder sister of the three children, who was, as the poet expresses it, "sitting in the lap of womanhood," having just counted her twentieth summer, looked grave. "Papa would not like you to borrow anything of the Careys, dear Harold. Pray take it back safely. Old Mr. Carey is just the person to think you injured it, if anything is wrong with the machine a month hence. And, Harold, is your Latin ready for school?"

"Very nearly. Now look sharp. I will put

this concern safe away in the stable, and we will have another go at the lawn this evening. Is it not a splendid invention? Instead of a man slaving at a scythe for a whole day, even girls, you see, can use this machine."

"Yes, and tear their frocks to pieces also. Take care the twins do not get hurt, Harold," as the two little boys began to make vigorous efforts to help their elder brother to roll the machine off the grass. "Come away, Willie and Harry; you will only throw yourselves down."

But the twins pressed on, heedless of their sister's entreaties and commands, and she was soon left alone upon the lawn, all the others having moved off with the machine to put it in a place of safety.

As Christabel Kingscote turned to the house again, the middle section of one of the thick mullioned windows was opened, and a sweet face appeared at it, a sad but sweet face, marked with many lines, and troubled and anxious in its expression, just what the bright girlish countenance turned up to her might become, when her twenty summers had doubled, or more than doubled, their number.

"Chrissie, what are the children doing?"

"No harm, mother," was the reply, as Christabel stood close under the window in the gravel path, and looked up at her mother. "No harm. Harold has taken a fancy to mow the lawn with one of those new machines, and of course Katie

wanted to help him. They really have done it very well."

"Your father has gone into his dressing-room now; but I was so afraid the children's voices would disturb him: he did not go to sleep till nearly four o'clock. What a lovely morning!"

"Yes, like a May-day of old," said Christabel. "Shall I go in and ring for breakfast?"

"Yes, dear, I shall be down directly;" and then Christabel disappeared into the house, but Mrs. Kingscote still lingered at the window.

The May-days of old! yes, it was very like a morning long, long ago, when she had awakened first, a young and joyous bride, at Heatherington; when the lawn was smooth shaven, and the flower-beds neatly kept; when the roses and clematis were duly trained, and did not hang in such wild luxuriance; when the stables were not stables only in name, but carriage horses and riding horses were in the stalls; when all the faded furniture within the house was new and fresh, and hope and life were young and strong, with all the youth and strength of early years.

In that same garden over which she is now gazing with a sort of mournful earnestness, having in it a presage of farewell, Mrs. Kingscote had carried her first-born child in her arms, had watched her timid tottering steps; had seen her grow from babyhood to childhood, from childhood to girlhood, and from girlhood to that dawn of womanhood in which we first

know Christabel. Other children had gathered round the old home at Heatherington, all dear in their turn, all beloved, valued and cherished; but it was Christabel's lot to be the first who had wakened in her mother's soul the sweet and holy aspirations of maternity, and over her cradle had been dreamed many dreams, and many airy visions, which the children of later years did not share. When Christabel Kingscote received her baptismal name at the font in the seaworn church of Northam, in memory of a relation of her father, who bore it as a link with the family of the poet, whose verses had made the long-discarded name familiar in English ears,—there was no thought of the deep significance which lay hid in the musical syllables of Christabel, nor of the fact that the title had been claimed by many a disciple in the early ages of the church as an expression of membership. Christabel was her name, given to her simply because a Christabel Kingscote had borne it before her, and no thought of any deeper meaning crossed her mind now, or her parents' either. Sometimes, indeed, she wished she had a name more common, even if less musical, and was inclined to envy Katie her good plain Katharine, and her next sister her Saxon Alice.

When Mrs. Kingscote came into the drawing-room that morning, she was greeted by Christabel with a loving kiss.

"Will papa be down to breakfast?" she asked.

"I scarcely know, dear," was the weary answer ;
"he has said so little to me this morning."

Christabel was silent, and went on cutting the thick slices of bread, and apportioning the prescribed quantity of butter on the plates, which waited the coming of the five other children. As she was so engaged, the door opened, and her father entered the room, just as a tumultuous rush was made from the garden, through the low open window, by the hungry labourers, who had been at work, as we have seen, since early day.

Mr. Kingscote seated himself in his arm-chair, with a general good morning, neither returning nor repulsing his young daughter's kisses, but sharply telling the others if they made a noise they must march off. There was a little subdued murmuring and disputing after this, but every loud demonstration was hushed. Almost at the end of breakfast, Mr. Kingscote said, "I want you to go to Northam for me this morning, Christabel, as soon as you can."

"I can take any message, father," said Harold ;
"I am now off for school."

"When I want your services I will ask for them," said his father. "Christabel, come here !"

He rose as he spoke, and opened a door, which led first into a curious recess, such as is often found in old houses, and at the end of which another door formed an entrance into a

small oak-panelled room, filled with books, and here and there a dark mysterious-looking picture of former Kingscotes, let into the panels. A mass of pamphlets and papers lay piled on the square library table, and there was a pen in the ink, and a thick business-like letter lying on the blotting case.

"I want you to take this letter to Mr. Beresford. I can tell you, Christabel, what I don't tell your mother——"

"I wish you would tell her," Christabel ventured to interpose.

"No; she had better know it all at once, and not be tortured piecemeal. Those Cornish mines, into which Beresford inveigled me, have, as you know, long been hopeless, and went near to ruin me; but there is something else behind. Years ago, I was fool enough to become security for Beresford's brother. The Exeter bankers are down upon me for the money; and my belief is that Frank Beresford will make off—if he has not already done so—and leave me in the lurch!"

"Father!" Christabel exclaimed, and her rosy cheek became very pale, and her lip trembled; "will it be a very heavy loss, father?"

"It will be ruin!" he said. "I must try and sell this place, and go and work somewhere for you all. When those precious mines came to grief, I thought of applying to the high and mighty relation of your mother's who presides

over the trade of the western counties, or thinks he does ; but I hoped we might pull on in the old place, and by economy and care might save enough to provide for Harold's education, and in time retrieve ourselves a little. But this last blow is final !”

“ It has not actually fallen, has it, papa ?”

“ No ; but I know Beresford honour is not of the highest ; and it will not surprise me to find that half the Atlantic is already between me and Francis Beresford. But what is the use of talking about it ? Try and catch Jack Beresford, and ask him for an answer, before he rides off to Bideford on that sleek horse of his, and goes to act out the story of the spider and the fly in his dingy office in Bridge Court.”

“ Why did you lend Mr. Francis Beresford any money, papa ?”

“ Ah, child, that is a tale of the past, about which I can't talk now. Now go, will you ?”

Christabel took up the letter, and prepared to obey her father. As she was leaving the room she looked back at him settling himself in his chair before that hopeless pile of papers, and rubbing his forehead in a weary abstracted manner ; and something impelled her to return and have another last word.

She put her arm caressingly round his neck, and kissing his forehead, said, “ Things may brighten, papa ; and, anyhow, we are all together : we can help each other.”

"You are a good child," was the response ;
"but you do not know what a hard fight it will
be. God help us !"

Mr. Kingscote uttered these last three words
as so many utter them, as a mere form or charm ;
but the help was never really sought, nor the
Helper invoked believed in. Truly, to Mr.
Kingscote, He was a God very far off.

"Christabel !" Mrs. Kingscote called as Chris-
tabel passed the dining-room on her way up-
stairs. "Is anything very wrong, Chrissie ?"

"I hope not, mother darling ; I am only going
to Northam for papa, with a letter which needs
an answer, and Harold could not have brought
it, you know, till the evening. Alice, will you
begin the children's lessons for me ? I shall be
very quick."

"I promised to go and see Lena this morning,"
said Alice, in a discontented voice ; "but, of
course, I must put that off now."

"Oh, no ! you need not do that, Alice ; are
you going to luncheon at Abbot's Court ?"

"They asked me," said Alice ; "but it does not
matter."

"My dear Alice, I will take the twins' les-
sons, and Katie can read and write her exercises,"
said poor Mrs. Kingscote : "do not let there be
any discussion."

Christabel's bright face clouded, as she saw her
mother go towards the schoolroom with weary
steps, while Alice stood by the open window

with a book in her hand, and seemed quite content that it should be so arranged.

"Alice," said her sister, reproachfully, "surely you won't let mamma worry herself with the children this morning. Surely you can take the Gemini in hand for one hour."

Alice turned her dark dreamy eyes towards her sister, and said, in a tone of provoking indifference, "Don't make a scene about nothing ; I will go to the schoolroom directly. Mamma ~~is~~ so absurd ; of course I don't wish her to teach the children. I hope you will have a pleasant walk to Northam."

And then Alice disappeared into the garden, which did not look much like the way to the schoolroom, and Christabel went to fulfil her mission. Just as she was leaving the house, she heard Katie's voice :

"Alice, Alice, do come ! Harry has upset the ink all over mamma, and he and Willie are so naughty."

Christabel was turning to go to the rescue again, when her father opened the study door. "Not off yet!" he said sharply ; "what is the use of pretending to do my commissions, and then to linger about an hour in this way ? I had better have sent Harold."

Christabel did not say more than, "I am going directly, papa ;" and in another moment she was running down the drive towards the gate opening into the road. On through Devonshire lanes

Christabel went, high hedges on either side of her, where the wide open blossoms of the wild Scotch rose were looking out from their small stunted bushes, and the pale dog-violet, and bright yellow ladies-fingers shone beneath, with the glory of the garden calceolaria.

Christabel went quickly on her way, with the light, elastic step of youth. The ascent from the valley in which Heatherington nestled was very slight, except just before the open country was reached, when a short, steep lane led to the brow of a succession of heath-clad hills, over which a narrow path wound to the village of Northam. Below Christabel's feet was an expanse of gold-coloured sand, over which the waves were now gently murmuring their farewell, till the returning tide should bring them back with their message from the ocean stretching far away to the westward—that ocean over which so many adventurous hearts had set sail in days of old, towards the real and fancied treasures of the new world. The steep coast of North Devonshire, by Clovelly and Lynton, to the left of Christabel, was indistinct in a blue haze this summer morning; while Lundy Island, sometimes so clearly defined, with its dark brown rocks and sterile precipices, only looked like a dim, shadowy line—a visionary islet of the sea—which might melt and fade away at any moment. A few stately ships and lesser craft were sailing out from the mouth of the Taw

and the Torridge, with canvas spread to catch the soft breeze and the bright shining of the May-day sun. The grey band of the pebble ridge, against which the great Atlantic billows make perpetual moan at full tide, girded the yellow sand in its embrace for more than two miles, looking, to Christabel's eye, precisely the same as it had looked to that other Christabel years and years before, and to many more who had been sleeping their last long sleep in Northam churchyard for several centuries.

On one side of the ridge of grey pebble stretched the wide expanse of turf, known as Northam Burrows ; and here were dotted flocks of sheep and cattle grazing upon the short grass, and protected from the sea as if by the barrier of slate-coloured stones, which rises twenty feet on the land side, but slopes more gradually seaward.

It was given to Christabel Kingscote to have ever a keen and fresh delight in the beauty to be found in the daily path of those who live where God has shown forth His power and goodness in the glory of created things.

Alice, who was just at that place in her life where the brook and river meet, found Heatherington dull, hopelessly dull. All her aspirations were for change and variety. The natural beauties which surrounded her were but a name, while to Christabel they were reality and enjoyment, never to grow tame or uninteresting from frequent

intercourse, but always to have a voice and a mission, which she could not have put into words had she tried. Every change on the face of the sea, every purple shadow that came and went over the country side, every flower as it blossomed in its season in the hedgerows, every tree as it bore the fresh greenery of spring, the full and sober majesty of summer, or the crimson tints of autumn, was an interest to Christabel ; a real hearty interest, never to be gathered from books, never to be acquired by that forced stacking up of knowledge without any winnowing of the grain, which is a characteristic of some women in these days ; but a healthy poetic vein, lying deep, and adorning the whole life with a beauty thousands miss.

So this morning, of which I write, Christabel paused for a moment or two to look round her, with eyes kindling and parted lips, from which broke forth now and then a gentle expression of pleasure, heard only by the nodding foxgloves empurpling the hill-side, as they bent their graceful heads towards her where the path narrowed, and her simple cotton dress brushed against their stems as she passed, startling the brown bees from their deep cells, and sending them off on busy wing, with their happy hum of successful labour.

Christabel forgot, for the time, the pressure of home troubles ; and it was not till she had fairly descended the hill, and seen the gabled roof

of Mr. Beresford's new country villa at Northam, close at hand, that she remembered the large blue letter lying in her pocket, and drew it forth with a sigh, looking at it with a wistful, questioning glance. It was sealed with her father's seal, where the arms of the Kingscotes were quartered with her sweet and gentle mother's; and there was something in the size of the seal, and the firm, decided hand-writing of the address, which seemed to indicate that the letter was written with some earnestness of purpose; and was indeed a business letter. The sleek horse of which Mr. Kingscote had contemptuously spoken, was waiting at the door of "Marina," when Christabel opened the white gate, and went up the well-rolled drive leading to the house. A horse-cloth was thrown over the horse, and a boy, holding the rein, turned to pace a few yards away, as Christabel advanced. Almost at the same moment the door opened, and Mr. Beresford himself came out.

"What do you mean," he said, addressing the boy, "by letting the horse's heels plough up the drive in this way? The moment I am gone you may employ yourself by rolling the gravel; do you hear?" and as he spoke he stooped to pick up a scrap of paper and a dried leaf on the doorstep.

Evidently, neatness, or perhaps the exaggeration of neatness, was Mr. Beresford's hobby. When he had finished his scrutiny of the spotlessly

white doorstep, Mr. Beresford became aware of Christabel's presence. He was a tall man, with a slight stoop, and had a way of looking out at people and things from under his black eyebrows, which was not pleasant. Whatever his mouth was, it was hidden by a dark beard, not so common in those days as now, and the prominent feature above the beard was a nose of the hawk type—which, as far as outward signs may be trusted, might suggest to thoughtful observers that Mr. Beresford feathered his own nest at the expense of any gentle and unwary bird which might come too near his circle of movement. For Mr. Beresford always moved in circles; straight lines were not acknowledged in his vocabulary.

"My dear Miss Kingscote, how delighted my sister will be to receive this early visit! She was only saying just now, that she must find her way across the hills to Heatherington soon. It is ages since we saw you. Do pray come in. You will excuse me, I know, as we unfortunate business people never have a moment we can call our own. Very different to the easy-going life of a country gentleman living on his own pretty estate, like your good father. This way, Miss Kingscote."

There are strong reasons for believing that Mr. Beresford had from the first moment seen the large and well-filled envelope in Christabel's hand, and divined what the contents were likely

to be ; but it suited him to start with surprise when Christabel said, in a calm quiet voice,—

“ My father asked me to bring you this letter, Mr. Beresford, and if there is an answer I will take it, if you please.”

“ Really, I am shocked you should have had the trouble. If you will allow me, I will take the letter to Bideford. I do not infect the air of Maiana with business, and my time is up, I am afraid. I am already due at Bridge Court. Rachel,” he said, opening the door of the drawing-room, “ here is Miss Christabel come to see your new screen. Oh ! she is not here. Take a seat, Miss Kingscote, and I will summon Rachel, and then I fear I must take leave of you.”

“ My father begged me to ask you for an answer to that letter,” Christabel said, gently but firmly.

“ It is really distressing to refuse a lady’s request ; but you must forgive me this once. This document would take an hour to read, and, it may be, an hour to answer. Ah, Rachel, here is an unexpected pleasure for you.” And as Miss Beresford entered the room her brother slipped past her, and disappeared.

Miss Rachel Beresford came tripping up to Christabel ; her dress, like the house, faultlessly neat and precise, and wearing her middle age with a sort of pleased acknowledgment of the fact, which harmonized with her satisfaction about everything which surrounded her.

"It is so long since I have seen you, Christabel, though I know girls of your age find other interests, and very natural too. And how are your mamma and the children? John says Alice looks quite grown up now."

Christabel tried to answer the questioner, and respond to the greeting of Miss Beresford as well as she could. But the stream of her talk was so unbroken that to get in a word seemed almost impossible.

"It looks pretty from here this morning, does it not?" Miss Beresford continued, going to the window. "John has just had the venetian blinds repainted, and I must show you the new screen I have worked; not that this is a time for us to think of fires, is it? or screens?" And Miss Beresford glanced at the brightly polished grate, where tissue paper, significantly arranged, seemed to defy the presence of coals and wood for many months to come. "I will just get the screen; it is bead work, and I must say I think it is very pretty."

And then Christabel was left alone while Miss Beresford went to fetch the latest specimen of her handicraft.

The drawing-room at Marina was long, and had a pretty bow-window facing the sea; but it was, although well furnished, a very uninhabitable room. A large brown-holland cloth lay in the middle of the carpet, and strips of brown holland made pathways to the door and window.

The round table was covered with books at regular intervals, in piles of one, two, and three, and in the centre a vase of wax flowers stood resplendent, covered with a large glass shade. Several good engravings from modern pictures hung on the walls, which were painted a pale cold grey ; and on the mantelpiece and chiffonier stood a goodly array of china jars and cups of every size and proportion. The room was, to a certain extent, familiar to Christabel, though her visits to Marina had been less frequent latterly. She had ever had a sort of undefined shrinking from Mr. Beresford, and had often wondered at her father's orders to her mother and to herself to be civil to him. These orders had been less persistently urged of late, and intercourse with the Beresfords had been less and less frequent. This morning Christabel's thoughts were almost wholly engrossed by the letter which the lawyer had carried away unanswered, and she looked with an unseeing eye at the glory of the elaborate bead work, with which Miss Beresford soon returned in triumph. Just as Christabel had almost exhausted all her expressions of admiration, the door of the drawing-room opened with a sudden burst and a young man came quickly in, leaving the print of his boot upon the spotless brown holland, and displacing two or three books on the table, as he stumbled over a footstool, on his way to Christabel.

“Take care what you are about, St. Aubyn,”

said Miss Beresford, sharply. "What business have you here at this time? You ought to be at the office. I am perfectly ashamed of you, coming in here with those dirty feet; now then, your room is more welcome than your company."

A crimson flush rose to the boy's cheek, and his eyes flashed angrily; but he stood his ground defiantly, ignoring his aunt's reprimand altogether.

"I have got the specimen of the *Actonia Aurora* for Mrs. Kingscote," he said; "I found it on Lundy Island, the other day. It is a good specimen, and I will bring it up to Heatherington, if you like."

"Thank you, very much," said Christabel. "Mamma has been so anxious to get that for her aquarium. It is very kind of you."

No wonder that silvery voice was music in St. Aubyn Beresford's ears. No wonder that sweet face, now looking at him with such a bright pleasant expression, was as the guiding star of his life; a life so barren of tender words or loving interests; a life bound by no home ties, a life softened by no associations of shared joys or sorrows.

While St. Aubyn spoke, Miss Beresford looked unutterable things; then when Christabel had rejoined she broke out, "I don't think Mrs. Kingscote, for the sake of all the anemones in the world, would approve of your making off to

Lundy for a day and a night without leave, neglecting your duties, and altogether behaving in a most disgraceful manner. Yes, I don't hesitate to say it, a most disgraceful manner."

St. Aubyn's lip curled, and he merely said, sarcastically, "Thank you, Aunt Rachel, for your good character; it is not the first you have given me." And then he was gone with no very gentle gesture, and was heard whistling in the hall before the house shook with the violence with which the outer door was slammed as he left Marina.

"Really, that boy is becoming intolerable, ill requiting our care and kindness. It was so kind of John, to take him into the office, considering his father's circumstances and difficulties. It was done from the best motives, and now——"

"Where is Mr. Frank Beresford?" Christabel tried to ask in an indifferent tone. "Where is St. Aubyn's father?"

But Miss Beresford became suddenly intent on examining the dirty footmarks on the carpet, and repeated, "And now our only reward is ingratitude—poor, ignorant boy that he is!"

Christabel felt too shy to repeat her question; it might look like prying into other people's private concerns, she thought; and after a few more harangues from Miss Beresford on a variety of subjects, she bid her good-bye, and retraced her way over the hills.

When Christabel had reached the path wind-

ing amongst the foxgloves and heather, she heard a rustling in some brushwood a little above her, and in another minute St. Aubyn Beresford had come down with a succession of long strides to the place where Christabel stood.

"Did I frighten you?" he asked; "I beg your pardon if I did."

"You did not frighten me," she said; "but I thought you would have been half-way to Bideford by this time."

"I shall never go there again. I have had enough, and too much of it. I can't stand it; and I shall make off to the other side of the world. I mean it," he continued; and the delicately cut lips were firmly set; "I mean it."

"Spare the poor foxgloves," Christabel said, quietly; for the boy was striking them down with his cane, and laying their stately heads low, as if he had been fighting against an enemy sword in hand. "Spare the poor foxgloves!" she repeated, as she tenderly raised one beautiful cluster from the ground, as if it were a fallen friend. "I am so sorry for you," she added, in a lower tone.

"For me, or for the flower?" he asked bitterly.

She looked up into his face, and said simply, "For you."

Immediately the bitterness died out of the boy's face, and a softer mood came over him.

"Miss Kingscote," he said, "you do not know all I have to go through every day. They tease

me and worry me, and throw their kindness, as they call it, at my head, till I am sick of hearing of all I owe them. Then the office work is what I hate. It is a low sort of business, which gentlemen ought not to touch ; and if my uncle has higher and better work, which I dare say he has, I see nothing of that. Then he treats me with such scorn, as if I were a dog ; and though," and here his voice sank, "and though I know and I feel my poor father has tarnished his name, and that he has given every one connected with him a great deal of trouble, still he is my father, and it is more than I can stand, to hear him constantly spoken of, as I do."

"Where is your father now, do you know?"

"He has left the country again ; but no one knows precisely where he is, I believe. He got into some fresh difficulties lately, and there was a great row with my uncle ; but I know no particulars. Nothing is told me. I am treated like a child, just as much as when I went to the grammar-school at Bideford, and I am a man now."

Christabel was silent for a few minutes, and they walked on, sometimes side by side, sometimes singly, as the width of the path allowed. St. Aubyn was quiet and subdued, and the foxgloves were allowed to nod unmolested. Christabel was thinking of how much was contained for her father in the words, "He has left the country again, but no one knows where he is

gone." Then the security would have to be paid ; the blow would fall ; and most likely it would be necessary to leave Heatherington to strangers ; and seek another home.

Presently she roused herself, and turning to her companion, said, " We have known each other a long time, St. Aubyn. Do not do anything hastily, that you may repent hereafter."

" I cannot stay where I am," he said. " I have a little money, which I suppose they can't cheat me out of, which will come to me when I am of age, and that will be in September. Still, I don't believe I can wait till September. I only flare up and get into a rage, oftener every day."

" But there is no need that you should," she said, quietly. " We have all our trials of temper, I suppose, and we have all need to exercise forbearance."

They had reached the crest of the last hill now, and she turned to bid him good-bye, saying, " You will go to Bideford, I know, and you can still be at Bridge Court by eleven."

" I would do anything you wished me," he said, the colour coming to his cheeks, " but if you knew all I go through at that hole in Bridge Court, and saw all I have to bear at Marina, you would rather see me working my way out to America in that brig now sailing to the right of the Shutter Rock. If I had a mother," he went on, " if I had only the memory of a mother,

I believe I could bear everything better ; but I have only her name, and two or three books with that name written in them, and one with mine—what she wished it to be, I mean—for I was not baptized when she died. I should like to show you that book some day."

"I should like to see it," she answered in a low tone.

"Christabel," St. Aubyn began, "you have always been kind to me, always had a smile for me, always brightened my life, when you have come near me. You must know, whatever happens, I shall only have one hope and one aim. You must know what I mean."

She did know very well, and her calm earnest eyes met his with a sad wistful gaze. But Christabel was not a silly girl, whose heart trembled like a leaf at this outburst of boyish love. She was a thoughtful tender woman, with a depth of character and a strength of purpose in advance of her years. She knew how the very name of Beresford was woven in with all the family griefs and troubles which just now seemed gathering, like a dark cloud overhead, and threatened to burst in a storm which would sweep away the shelter of her early home, and send her, and those she loved, out into the world to learn hard lessons of patience and self-denial.

So, whatever her first impulse might have been, she only said, "St. Aubyn, I shall always think of you as a friend, and would do anything I

could to help you ; but that is not much : but I hope, I shall ever hope, brighter days will come for you."

"They could not come without you," said St. Aubyn ; "if I had you, every day must be bright. Don't turn away from me ; no one will ever love you as I do. I could work in that den at Bridge Court for years if I thought you would not turn away from me at last. I have no one in the world to love me," he continued ; "remember that, Christabel : I stand alone ; O Christabel, say one word to me, that you do not despise and hate me, and think me unworthy to say this to you—to you !"

"St. Aubyn," she answered, laying her little hand gently on his arm to calm his excitement, "I can say nothing more now than that you may ever count upon me as your friend. I must go home ; I have delayed too long as it is. My father is so anxious for an answer to the letter to your uncle, which I brought to Marina this morning. Although I have none to take him, still I must not keep him in suspense. Good-bye."

She went swiftly down the hill ; but St. Aubyn stood where she left him. When Christabel reached the bend in the road, she turned and looked back at him. He was still standing motionless. She waved her hand as a farewell, and vanished from his sight.

CHAPTER II.

EVENING SHADOWS.

"To me, at least, was never evening yet,
But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
For past is past."

ROBERT BROWNING.

"COME into the garden, mother, or take a turn with me up the cliff path ; it will do you good. The children are all busy finishing their mowing. It will do you good—do come," she urged.

"I don't think I can, dear Christabel," was Mrs. Kingscote's answer ; "all my strength and spirit have died out of me. Your father—O Christabel, you do not know what it is to me to see him thus ; and the hardest part is, that he does not come to me for comfort. There must be something very wrong with me, Christabel."

Christabel drove back her tears, and only said, "Here are your shawl and your bonnet, mother ; and you must come, it is such a beautiful evening, clearer and more beautiful than the morning was, if that is possible !" Christabel was not to be

refused—she tied the straw bonnet with its faded lilac strings under her mother's chin, and wrapped the light llama shawl round her slight figure, saying, "You will never grow old, mamma ; you look fresh and young now."

"Sad flattery, my dear. Not into the garden," she said, as Christabel turned that way. "Let us go up to the cliff-house, and sit there. I could not bear the children's voices—poor, poor children. Alice is still at Abbot's Court, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Alice's luncheons there always extend through the whole day. I cannot see what there is so very attractive in Lena Adair, and that pompous Mr. Adair is perfectly intolerable to my mind."

"Ah, dear Christabel, we shall soon be far away from all these old ties, and from people we have known all our lives. We shall be glad then of Mr. Adair."

"I shall not," said Christabel. "I wonder where papa is now."

"At Exeter, I hope ; but he will be too late to see Mr. Henderson to-day. However, there is no hope : he will have to pay the money. The bank has been really very patient ; and now this man is finally out of the country, and has left a great many debts behind him, there is no chance of any reprieve. Oh, what harm the Beresfords have done us ! It is difficult to forgive them. Your father is no match for such terribly deceitful people."

Christabel was silent, and the mother and daughter turned up the cliff path, behind the Heatherington garden, to a little summer-house, which commanded a similar view to that which Christabel had looked at in the morning from the crest of the heath-clad hills. Only, this view was wider and more extended, and all that had been hazy and dim in the morning was now radiant with the glory of sunset. The rocky cliffs up which Clovelly builds its strange perpendicular streets were distinctly visible; and Lundy Island was all aglow with the western light; standing out clear and sharp in outline against a sky where amber melted into the softest carmine, as the sun sank like a globe of fire below the sea.

"Mother," said Christabel, when they were seated in the cliff-house, as the little Kingscotes called the rough erection of fir cones, straw, and thatch, which Mr. Kingscote and an old servant had constructed in happier days; "mother, do you know the whole story about Mr. Francis Beresford and papa. Were they ever friends? how was it?"

"Don't you know the story, Christabel? but I forgot, how should you? It is so long past now, and the one principally concerned in it has gone to her rest so many years. Your dear father had a strong and romantic attachment to Mary St. Aubyn; but she did not return it—never returned it—and married Frank Beresford, who

was then practising as a lawyer in London, and supposed to be a prosperous man. But he was not really so—a few months after his marriage he got into some great difficulty, and asked your father to lend him some money, which he said would save him from ruin. He represented his young wife as ill, and distressed at his impending ruin, and for her sake your father lent him the sum required, and a few months later became his security to the bank, with one other person since dead, for a large sum, which was to set him afloat in a remunerative business. There was some sort of agreement that your father should enjoy a share of the profits of this business in return for the benefit of his name as security. The two Beresfords and your father had been boyish associates and schoolfellows. Old Mr. Beresford was a respectable man, and transacted all your grandfather's business for him. Frank was sent to school at Winchester, and he was there with your father. As far as I can remember, for he has not been in this neighbourhood for years, he was a pleasant bright man, with attractive manners. Very different to the Bideford attorney, his elder brother. Still he was reckless and extravagant, and without any fixed principle."

"And his wife died when she was very young, I suppose?" Christabel asked.

"Yes, within a fortnight after St. Aubyn's birth; she was scarcely two-and-twenty—poor

thing. We were just married then, your father and I, and he had told me all the story of his early love long before. It did not make him love me the less," Mrs. Kingscote said sadly, "But he ought to have married a rich woman," she continued; "this place was a heavy drag on us when we kept it up properly, and visited with the families in the neighbourhood, and we lived at some expense—a greater expense than we could really afford, for your father's inheritance had been much reduced by the extravagance of his elder brother."

"Uncle Harry, who was killed while hunting, you mean?"

"Yes, poor Harry—that was a terrible story. Then came the first heavy loss from that mine; and now the claim for the security we cannot meet."

"Papa told you all the particulars before he started to-day—did he not, mother?"

"Yes, but in as few words as possible. The post brought him the letter from the bank, demanding the payment, and Mr. Beresford sent the answer to his inquiries about one o'clock. There is no doubt Frank Beresford has left the country, and there is no doubt, also, that this man at Bideford has known it for some days."

"No doubt whatever," Christabel repeated. "I knew by his face this morning that he was perfectly sure of what was in papa's letter, and

could have given me the reply then and there, if he had chosen to do so. He is a most disagreeable man; so smooth, and oily, and deceitful."

"Yes," said Mrs. Kingscote; "I should think he could not be honest if he tried, and I am sure he never does try."

"Mother," said Christabel, after a pause, "what shall we do? shall I go out as a governess? would that prevent the necessity of leaving Heatherington to strangers?"

"I think not; indeed, I am sure of it," said Mrs. Kingscote; "besides, Christabel, we could not live without you. What should I do?"

Christabel slipped her hand into her mother's, and, turning to her with sudden earnestness, kissed her affectionately. Such demonstrations were not common with Christabel, and were always hailed by her clinging, loving mother with pleasure.

"My darling, whatever happens, we must keep you!"

Then there was silence for a few minutes, broken only by the gentle wail of the billows as they rippled over the pebble ridge,—the cry of a sailor boy in a boat,—the hum of a cock-shafer, or the distant voices of the children in the garden. A speckled thrush, in a tangle of underwood on the cliff, broke forth now and then into a carol loud and clear; while out on Lundy Island, as the gorgeous colouring of the sunset sky faded,

and the grey solemnity of evening gathered over sea and land, the twinkle of a light grew brighter and more bright as the light-house lamp was kindled, to revolve with steady radiance till day-break.

"It is getting late, Christabel," Mrs. King-scote said, at last; "we had better go home!"

"Mother!" and a strange sadness might be detected in Christabel's voice as she spoke; "Mother, I would never hide anything from you; and though what I have to tell you does not amount to much, still I feel I must have no secrets from you."

"What is it, Christabel?" said her mother, with something of fear in her manner; "what is it?"

"Only!" and Christabel looked far out to sea as she spoke; "only that St. Aubyn Beresford told me this morning that he loved me very much—that he has loved me for years—that is all."

"And you, Christabel, what did you say?"

"Nothing, but that I should ever be his friend, as I always mean to be. Mother, let us go home now."

"My dear child, St. Aubyn is but a boy, not a year older than you are; and just imagine what a stock he springs from. I know, dear, you must see that his being his father's son is quite enough to decide the point, even if he were everything in himself that is desirable."

"There is no point to decide," was Christabel's quiet answer. "I do not think there is any need, just now, to tell papa what I have told you. St. Aubyn talks of leaving Bideford, and having no more to do with these relations of his, who have been so unkind to him. Very likely I shall not see him many times more. Now, mamma, we need not talk any more about it; the children will want their suppers, and Alice is not at home."

This was said with all her old brightness of manner, and before they reached the house she was like herself again.

The lawn was finished, and Harold was dragging off the machine towards the stable-yard once more; while Katie and the twins were sweeping up the grass that had been cut, and old Joseph, the feeble old servant, who cleaned boots and shoes and knives, and professed to attend to the kitchen and flower-garden, stood by, surveying the scene in the dim twilight with sundry grunts and ejaculations.

"Well, give me the real article afore that gimcracky thing, and tell me of a bit of grass mown with the scythe afore one cut in that there way."

"But you see, Joseph, you would not mow the grass with a scythe, and it was nearly up to Willie's ankles," said Katie, vigorously sweeping up the last mimic hay-cock at the farther end of the lawn. "Now, to-morrow we will get your

wheelbarrow, and carry our hay, and it will keep the two cows for a month."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Joseph, wrathfully. "No, I should rather think I didn't mow the lawn; what with the work about the place, my back is near broken, as it is. It ain't likely one man can get through what three men and a boy used to get wages for; it ain't likely, Miss Kate. And if you go breaking the wheelbarrow to-morrow morning when you fill it with that grass, you must just tell the master you did it, and not lay it on me."

Then Joseph put his silk handkerchief in the crown of his hat after a final polish of his bald pate, which was already as bright as earthenware, and hobbled off, giving his head several nods before the weather-beaten covering settled finally to his satisfaction.

Almost at the moment of Joseph's departure a little carriage drawn by two pretty white ponies rolled up to the door of the house. The summer twilight was still sufficient to show that it was driven by a young lady, who was quite mistress of the occasion, and took the sweep up the drive with great effect, pulling up precisely at the right moment, exclaiming at the same time, "How do you do, Mrs. Kingscote? Ah! Christabel, how are you? I have brought back the truant; but I dare say you guessed where she was. No, thanks, I won't get out," as the man-servant in attendance jumped from the back seat and went to the

ponies' heads ; "papa will have woke up from his after-dinner nap, and if he misses me he will be sending the Bideford crier round the country. Good-bye, Alice, and remember Wednesday is the day of the flower-show at Bideford, and Alice is to come, please, Mrs. Kingscote."

"I am not sure that I can come," were Alice's last words, as her friend touched the ponies' backs with the whip, and turned away from the door with the same speed with which she had come, saying, "Good-bye, every one."

Alice turned sharply to Katie, when the carriage was gone, "What a figure you are, Katie, in that battered hat, and such horridly dirty hands! How could you let Lena Adair see you in such a condition?"

"Lena Adair is welcome to the sight," said Katie, saucily ; "but I expect she would not deign to look at me, and if she did, by this light she could not see my hands."

"Have you had a pleasant day, dear Alice?" Mrs. Kingscote asked.

"Yes, rather too pleasant," was Alice's reply.

"Come in to supper now, children," Mrs. Kingscote said ; "it is very late for the twins. Your father is gone to Exeter, Alice ; he went at one o'clock."

"Oh ! did he?" Alice rejoined in an abstracted voice ; "no, I don't want any supper, mother," she said, swinging her brown straw hat by the

ribbons, with which, in those days when hats of any kind were a novelty, they were always tied ; "I dined at seven and have had coffee since ;" and then ascending the wide staircase, Alice disappeared.

Her mother sighed as she went into the dining-room, where Christabel was presiding over the basins of bread and milk and the slices of cake, which was neither very new, nor very plentifully supplied with currants.

"Have you looked on the sideboard, Chrissie?" Harold asked. "There is something there for you ; St. Aubyn Beresford brought it when you and mother were out, and he said I was not to let anyone touch it. He was not at all in a jolly mood, but awfully grumpy."

"He helped us with the machine," said little Harry, with his mouth full ; "we should not have finished the lawn if he hadn't helped."

"Nonsense," put in Harold, "that shows how much you know about it. There are some sea anemones in a bottle for mother's aquarium : the Actonia Aurora ; but there is a book too. May I put these fellows into the aquarium, mamma ?" Harold asked.

Then, as his mother acquiesced, saying, "It is very kind of St. Aubyn," all the young heads were collected round the bottle, where three closely folded sea anemones were discovered, by the light of the lamp, securely fastened to several small pebbles.

"Had you not better leave them till the morning; my dear?" Mrs. Kingscote interposed.

"Oh no, mamma! he said they were to be turned out to-night; this bottle is so close for them after the sea; just fancy the difference!" exclaimed Katie.

"The aquarium does not seem much bigger to the anemone mind, Miss Katie," said Harold, who was taking off the paper cover tied over the wide mouth of the bottle, preparatory to launching the anemones into their new home.

"What is the book, Christabel?" her mother asked.

"I don't know, mamma; I will show it to you to-morrow morning," she said, "and tell you all about it. Now I must take the twins to bed. Come Katie, come Harry and Willie—you have had a long day too, Harold, pray come upstairs."

"Very well," said Harold, "I am too sleepy to do any good at my lessons to-night, so I will follow your advice, Christabel, and betake myself to repose like Mr. and Mrs. Actonia Aurora."

Another hour had passed, and silence reigned at Heatherington Manor. The two maid-servants, who divided the labour of the dairy and house, were in bed, and Mrs. Kingscote had retired early, not unwilling to try and forget her anxieties in sleep. As Christabel stooped over her and kissed her, she said, "Have you found out what is the matter with Alice, dear?"

"Oh! nothing, mother, except that the luxu-

ries of Abbot's Court always have an unfortunate effect on Alice; and she wants to go to this flower-show; and has not a dress, she thinks, nice enough. I am going to try what I can do with those lilac muslins with carnations on them; they are not faded, and I think hers and mine together will make a suit; and it is thought the correct thing now to have gown and mantle alike, you know. A few lilac bows and a sash; and it will be quite grand. Good night, dear mother!"

"You are a kind sister, dear Christabel; God bless you!" were her mother's parting words.

Then Christabel went to her room, where she was often glad to find refuge from the perplexities and sorrows of family life. It was but a little room, with a large latticed window, which almost occupied one side of it, and it had no extensive view from it, for it was at the back of the house, and looked out on the walled kitchen garden and a tangled shrubbery. In summer even these were almost shut out by an old elm tree, which had once been the first of an avenue leading off to the road by a path now grass grown and irregular, but where two or three other trees of the same age still stood at intervals, and indicated that time had made these gaps in their numbers, and had left but two or three specimens to show what the glory of the whole must once have been. Again and again had Christabel pleaded for her own tree, when

her father looked disparagingly at the accumulation of leaves beneath it in autumn ; which Joseph was slow to sweep away. "The old tree makes that side of the house damp," Mr. Kingscote would say, and only Christabel's entreaties had hitherto spared it. She knew every turn of its naked branches, every intricacy of its twigs, as they made a delicate tracery against the sky in winter. She loved the sound of the first faint rustle of the young leaves in April days ; the pattering of the thunder shower amongst the full foliage, when the thirsty land was laved by streams of refreshment in sultry August noon-tides ; she liked to hear the sound of the wind in the branches, when October storms lashed the billows into angry foam upon the pebble ridge ; or when the gentle breezes of the south set the emerald leaves to whisper a lullaby to the nests as they rocked softly to and fro, and the young rooks in the topmost boughs of all, thought what a pleasant life they led on the tree top, as the fleecy clouds sailed over them.

To-night, when Christabel went to her room, the moon was shining bright and clear in the May sky, and the stars were looking down upon the earth with that steadfast gaze which we must all have felt, at some time or other of our lives, to be as an earnest of the faithfulness and reality of Him who has called the glittering host by name, and would teach us by them His changeless perfection, in contrast with the transitory

insecurity of all earthly props and stays. Christabel opened the window, round which an old honeysuckle clung, and sat down on the wide window-seat with the book St. Aubyn had left for her on her knee. A candle, standing on a little table near, flickered as the night wind wandered in, and a poor moth came to share the fate of his race, and singed his wings so often that at last he lay dead on the table, allured to his own destruction by the brightness in which he was to find his death. A strange reluctance to open the parcel seemed to possess Christabel: it was almost to her as if she stood at the point where two paths lay before her, and she must now choose which she should take. Unwilling to decide, or be obliged to tell herself that the decision was made, she leaned against the old casement, into which the honeysuckle sent its fragrance, and thought over the past of her short life. Her happy joyous childhood; her father and mother loving and united; Heatherington well kept, and a proper number of servants to do their appointed work; guests coming and going; her father riding out on a handsome horse, and she, on a little pony, at his side; her mother watching them with proud, pleased eyes; and her father telling her she was a capital little horsewoman. Yes, and it was one day when she rode into Bideford with her father, on this very pony, that she first saw St. Aubyn Beresford. A boy coming out of the school-house with a

satchel over his shoulder threw a ball to one of his schoolfellows, which missed its aim, and struck Christabel on the ear, then rebounding frightened "Taffy" into unwonted gambols, and finally he would have made towards Bideford bridge had not a strong hand, though but a boyish one, been laid on the bridle, and with something of chivalrous courtesy St. Aubyn asked, "Are you hurt? I am so sorry one of our fellows did it." Then Christabel remembered how her father interposed, saying, it was very careless of the boy whoever he was, and a serious accident might have been the result, if his daughter had not had a good seat! Then he hesitated for a moment, and at last said, "I know your face, do I not? I owe you thanks for your presence of mind, it was well done, my boy. Christabel and I are much obliged to you, are we not, Chrissie? Let us know your name?"

"St. Aubyn Beresford," was the answer. "Mr. Beresford's nephew, in Bridge Court," the boy had said, with a heightening colour, as he also added, "and Mr. Francis Beresford's son."

"Oh, yes! to be sure," Mr. Kingscote had replied, and then with some repetition of his thanks, perhaps a little less cordial than before, they had ridden homewards.

The boy's face, as Christabel had seen it then, eight years ago, was before her now; the refined delicate features, the sensitive quivering mouth, the dark grey eyes, that could flash with such

terrible power when the spirit within was roused by the hard sense of injustice, or the perpetual irritation of opposing elements, which the young find it so hard to bear in their daily life—the irritation, not of wholesome discipline, when love is the mainspring of it all, but the wayward caprice of that rule which has neither wisdom nor affection to guide it. And those eight years, which lay between the day when first Christabel and St. Aubyn had met and the present time, had brought many changes in their course, beside the changes from childhood to maturity, and the great gulf which lies between twelve and twenty in a woman's life. Little by little the owner of Heatherington had sunk in worldly prosperity, and, in a strange manner, which Christabel had never understood till that evening, St. Aubyn's father had, no less than the keen-witted Bideford lawyer, been implicated in all the money difficulties and losses which had left such bitter traces behind them already, and were to work still greater troubles for them all before long. Christabel on looking back could now always read that her father's manner to St. Aubyn when present, and his expressed opinion of him when absent, had been fitful and varied. Sometimes he would speak of him as too good for the people with whom he lived, and say he was worthy of better things; and would take his part when his own children recounted instances of Aunt Rachel's harshness and fidgety particularity; or Mr.

Beresford's cutting contempt and effort to thwart every pleasure natural to the young, and especially to boys. At other times he would say St. Aubyn deserved all he got ; that he was unfairly quartered in his Bideford relations, and that he ought to attend to his duties in the office and be thankful to earn his daily bread ; that the education he had received was quite enough for an attorney's clerk, and it was absurd to encourage him to aspire to anything superior ; indeed, he should not allow intimate associations between him and his own children ; Harold had better find a worthier object of admiration amongst those who were more in his own rank in life.

" St. Aubyn's mother was as well born as any one in the county," Harold had rejoined not many days ago, when the subject had been discussed. And his father had sharply bid him talk of things which he understood, and allow him to be the best judge of who were, and who were not fitting associates for him.

Christabel told herself to-night that her father had great cause of complaint against the man who had betrayed his trust and showed himself unworthy of all confidence ; and her mother's story of the past had unveiled a mystery which she had never known to exist before : but she told herself too, that if there was wrong-doing in those connected with him by the closest ties, St. Aubyn was free of blame. She saw him as he really was—impulsive, generous, and sensitive, reading

hard to keep up with the requirements of the times; doing all he could to cultivate his mind and bear his head up bravely against the atmosphere of sordid money getting and scheming which surrounded him. Tenderly Christabel thought over all this, and the many trials which beset St. Aubyn's path. His love of music scoffed at, and silenced, effectually silenced, by the capture of a violin that he had bought second-hand with his own savings, and which offended Miss Rachel's ears, and now reposed at the top of her wardrobe, in a case from which the dust was carefully wiped every "sweeping day." "Yes, it was true," as he had said, "he stood very much alone in the world, and had no one to love him." At this point Christabel trusted herself to think no longer, she closed the window, and going to the table she unfastened the parcel. A note lay within, it had no address and began :

"This is the book I said I should like to show you. I have often wished to do so before, but I did not know that I might trouble you with my concerns. It was my mother's Bible, she wrote those words in it with her dying hand. I am going away, Christabel, and I wish to leave it with you. If I had the world to lay at your feet, I would gladly do it; but I have nothing, nothing, and I would not ask of you any pledge or promise that you will not forget me; I do not think you will. The little hand that raised the poor foxglove so tenderly raised a hope in me too. After I lost sight of you to-day, I went as you told me to Bideford. I encountered there what I can never encounter again, in the presence of my uncle's clerks—a storm of unseemly anger. Before to-morrow morning dawns I shall be sailing out westward, taking with me what small possessions I can count my own. I have a few pounds gra-

ciously advanced to me of the sum which will be my own in September. I am to write then and say where it is to be paid. And now I must work, and fight, and hope. Do you know, Christabel, there is a mountain in Granada which the vessels arriving from the African coast hail as the image of a saint, when they sight it first? Do you know the name of that mountain is *San Christobel*? Perhaps, some day, I, storm-bound and weather-beaten, may come back to look for my San Christabel, and see in her the fulfilment of hope long deferred, the crown of labour, the dawning of a brighter day in her smile of welcome—who can tell? May God bless you till then and for ever."

Before Christabel had read the last words, her eyes were dim with tears. "I too will hope and wait," she whispered, "he shall not be alone any more." Then she opened the Bible—it was a small polyglot version, with gilt rims and clasps; in those far-off days, when Mary St. Aubyn's name was first written there, it was thought a novel and priceless treasure. In the blank leaf was inscribed first the maiden name, then the married one, of the owner, with a text beneath: "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Then came a faint, scarcely legible, inscription, "For my baby, St. Aubyn Beresford, with his mother's dying love. May 2nd, 18—. Jesus, Thou good Shepherd, gather this lamb in Thy arms; let him not wander from Thee; let us meet before Thy face at last; let us know each other then—my baby and me." A few strokes more, which were wholly illegible, and that was all. Christabel turned over the pages of the book with a gentle, tender hand; here and there were

faint pencil-marks, under particular passages, and dates written, which had now no meaning for any living eye. But as Christabel went slowly on in her examination of the book, the thought struck her forcibly that it had been used and loved and valued. She felt that her own experience was very different; her soul could not say, "All my fresh springs are in Thee," and she knew it. Soon the Bible was closed, and folded with the note in the paper again, and then in another half-hour Christabel was asleep, while the night wind rustled in the elm tree, and the stars looked down with greater brightness as the moon set behind the heath-clad hills.

"No letter from your father," Mrs. Kingscote said, the next day, when she came into the schoolroom. The tardy postman had tramped up to Heatherington, leaving two letters, with the usual grumble about gentry that did not send in for their bags at the office giving a sight of trouble, and miles of extra walking.

"No letter! then he will be back to-night mother!"

"Yes, I suppose so, but I wish he had written, Christabel."

"I doubt if papa would have had time to write," said Katie, whose ears were open to what was passing, though she was, writing a French exercise. "Alice, do tell me that word again—Alice!" But Alice was too busy with the lilac muslin to heed her sister.

"Look for the past tense of the verb 'acquérir' in the grammar," said Christabel; "the conjugation is the same. Now, Willie and Harry, you may run and play." The twins scampered off without delay, and Katie very soon followed. Alice alone was left in the window-seat, bending over the dress.

"Christabel, will you tell me where I can find the ribbon? I may as well make up the bows to go down the front, as I can't finish the skirt till you have arranged about the flounce. It would be much prettier to have one."

"The ribbon is in the top drawer in the work-room, at the left-hand corner," said Christabel; "don't turn over everything till you find it." Alice departed with a murmured "Of course I shall not," and Christabel and her mother were alone.

"She seems very much engrossed with the thoughts of this flower-show," Mrs. Kingscote said. "Poor Alice! It is sad to me to think of you all, shut out from so many pleasures suited to your rank and age. I do so long to know what your father will decide to do in Exeter."

"I hope he will ask no favour of Sir Richard Talwyn, that is all," said Christabel, proudly. "Anything is better than to be left to the mercy of relations."

"Sir Richard is a very prosperous merchant," Mrs. Kingscote said, "and might be of some assistance to us, if he would."

"Yes ; if he would, mother," Christabel rejoined ; "I never can make out how it was you came of the Talwyn race."

"Sir Richard was my mother's brother, so it is a near relationship, Chrissie."

"Yes : it is a misfortune for any man to be too prosperous and then to get knighted, to give the prosperity the finishing touch. I almost think, mamma," she continued, after a pause, "it would be better for me to go away as a governess ; and then we might do with one servant here, and cut down every expense we can, and not leave Heatherington at all."

"My dear child, I am afraid all this would not meet the case ; we lost between five and six hundred a year by the mine, I believe, and if this security has to be paid it will be half as much again. No, Christabel, I think there will be no alternative."

At this moment the door was burst open by Harold.

"I say, mother, what do you think? St. Aubyn Beresford has cut and run ! Every one is talking about it ; but he is off, and no mistake. I am awfully sorry. He and his uncle had a row yesterday in the office ; one of Mr. Beresford's clerks is Travers' brother, at our school, you know, and he heard it all. St. Aubyn got very fierce, and so did Mr. Beresford ; and he is gone off this morning in the 'Sybil,' which is bound for Valparaiso. Heigh-ho ! I half wish I was

off, too," said Harold, flinging down his satchel, and then darting out of the room again as quickly as he had come.

"Gone! poor boy—really gone!" said Mrs. Kingscote. "Well, he had no real home to leave, and no one who will miss him, or wish for him back,—Christabel!"

For Christabel had risen from her chair, and, going close to her mother, knelt down by her, and put the book and the letter in her hands.

"Mother, I can have no secrets from you," she said; "please read this letter and look at the Bible, and tell me if I must show them to papa."

Her face was very pale, but her voice was calm and quiet, while she knelt by her mother's side awaiting her reply. As Mrs. Kingscote read the letter, the colour came to her cheeks, and sympathy with her daughter made her look almost as young and fresh as when she read her own first love-letter, more than two-and-twenty years ago.

"It is a manly, good letter, Christabel," she said, at last; "there is nothing to be ashamed of in it."

"No," said Christabel, firmly; "I am proud of it, mother."

"And the Bible, too—poor Mary's Bible; what a touching inscription. She was so good, poor thing—so deeply religious, Christabel, I always knew that,—my dear child!"

And then the mother opened her arms, and

Christabel was taken to them, as in her childish griefs and troubles, and found infinite comfort in the confidence thus perfect and unbroken between herself and her mother.

"I will tell your father some day, dear," she said at last ; "not quite yet, while the name of this poor boy is in itself so distasteful, and recalls so much trouble and sorrow. Take the book and the letter, darling, and put them away in a safe place. As St. Aubyn is gone, they cannot be returned, and you must keep them—it can do no harm. I think I know exactly how you feel about it : you have pitied St. Aubyn, and looked on him with the kindly interest of a sister, but nothing more."

"Yes, dear mother," said Christabel, after a pause ; "I think it *is* more than that, but I hope and believe it will have no bad effect upon me. I will try to do everything as before, and go on as I always do. Now I will just go and put these things away, and we will say no more about them now, or for a long time—years most likely," and she added to herself, "long years."

Then she was gone, and, taking up her hat from the table in the hall, she ran through the shrubbery to the cliff-house. A fresh breeze was stirring, and the sea was flecked with tiny crests of snowy foam. The tide was going out, and bearing forth on its bosom the stately ships, as it had done the day before.

"Could one be the Sybil?" Christabel asked herself.

Yes, though she knew it not, nor was able to separate it with any certainty from the rest. "The Sybil" was the foremost of the three large vessels which were sailing out so proudly with canvas fully set, and prow pointed bravely westward. On the deck of the "Sybil" there was one whose eyes were fixed upon the point on which the cliff-house stood. "That hill is my San Christabel," he thought. "And she may be there, though I cannot see her;" and even as the thought passed through his mind, there was a flutter of a light dress distinctly visible, as Christabel stood on the point in front of the cliff-house.

"It is she—it is my San Christabel," the boy said to himself. "I will take it as a good omen for my departure, and one day I may have her welcome, as now her farewell."

And the breeze quickened, and the tide went swiftly out, and very soon the "Sybil" became a speck in the distance, and then Lundy Island hid her and the other vessels from Christabel's sight.

For a few minutes longer Christabel stood on the point of the cliff, then she was roused by the voices of her little brothers, proclaiming, with breathless haste, that the bell had rung and dinner was ready, she must come directly.

"So I will," she said; "now then, let us race

down the hill, Harry and Willie, and see which of us can be at the stable first."

"A race—a race with Chrissie!" the children shouted gleefully, as she gave the start, "one—two—three!" and they scampered off towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

ABBOT'S COURT.

"Strong is the patience which is born of Hope."

LORD LYTON.

ON the third evening after his departure Mr. Kingscote came home. He walked suddenly into the drawing-room, where Christabel and her mother sat, and greeted them in the absent, almost cold manner that now so often characterized him,—a manner which tried his wife's spirit to the utmost, and sent her heart back with longing yearning to past times, when a day's absence was always followed by a rapturous welcome on her side, and undisguised pleasure on his.

"Did you walk from Northam, Philip? You must be very hot and tired; and it is so sultry this evening."

"Walk! Yes, of course I walked," he said, throwing himself into a chair.

"Harold," he shouted, "you will be off that

ladder, if you don't look out ; and then there will be a doctor's bill for broken limbs to add to the comfort of my life. What are you about, sir."

"Nailing up the clematis, papa ;" it was Katie who answered. "Harold and I are doing old Joseph's work for him ; and are making the place beautifully neat. We thought we should have finished by the time you came home."

The ladder was set up against the house, and Harold's feet were only just visible from the place her father occupied, and he went on with his work not heeding his father's injunction to come down.

"The sun dial was nearly hidden," Katie said, looking up admiringly ; having just come in at the window to kiss her father, and then taking up her position on the terrace walk again. "Harold, you have done it beautifully."

"What will you have, dear Philip ?" Mrs. Kingscote now asked. "Some cold beef and wine, or eggs, or ham."

"Wine ! most decidedly not," he answered, rather ungraciously. "Eggs and tea will suit me much the best."

"I will go and get it ready, papa," Christabel said ; "it will refresh you, you look so tired ; was it very hot in Exeter to-day ?"

"Yes ; it was like the mouth of a volcano, perfectly suffocating," was the response.

Then, when Christabel was gone, Mrs. King-

scote ventured to ask, "What arrangement did you make with the bank, Philip?"

"Payment of the whole amount at three months' date; and that was granted as a favour. We must leave this place, Emily, as soon as possible; and I hope I have found a tenant: only he may think it too shabby when he sees it. He is a relation of Mr. Henderson's, who has a fancy for North Devon air and country life. He is coming to see it in a day or two; we must try and freshen up the old place a little for his inspection."

"The furniture, is that to be let with the house?"

"Who would take it?" Mr. Kingscote asked sarcastically. "Your children have battered it, so that it is scarcely more than lumber. We must take a cart-load of it with us, and sell the rest."

"And where are we to go?" his wife asked in an almost despairing voice.

"I am sure I don't know; you must write to your grand uncle to-morrow, and ask his advice, I suppose."

He spoke so bitterly that his wife could scarcely bear it. She was one of those women who having a world of tenderness and love within them, need but a word to call it forth; but without that word, without that appeal to their sympathy, shrink back and make no advance, when they would so willingly and thankfully make a response. Now Mrs. Kingscote was

longing to throw herself into her husband's arms, and tell him how grieved she was for the bitterness of his trouble ; how ready to share it if he would only let her ; how content to bear anything for his sake and her children's ; but as she sat by the table quietly working, no one would have guessed what thoughts were busy within.

"Have you heard anything of Mr. Beresford?" was the next question timidly put, after a long pause.

"I have heard that he is a bankrupt, and that he has escaped his creditors by leaving the country. So much the worse for me ! and this smooth-tongued lawyer here, has known how the case has stood for days ; and for months he must have known that his brother was a stock or share broker, speculating right and left, and trying one scheme after another."

"Do you know when he last saw his boy, St. Aubyn?"

"Not I !" was Mr. Kingscote's answer ; "and I am sure I don't care. Emily, the less I hear the name of Beresford for the future the better, remember that."

"Papa, your tea is ready in the dining-room. Will you come?"

It was Christabel who spoke, as she opened the drawing-room door.

"I will come directly, and pray let me have some peace, and don't pester me with questions."

The father and daughter disappeared together ;

and Mrs. Kingscote buried her face in her hands: a short quick sob escaped her, and a sharp pang went to her heart. How was it that in this trouble she was no comfort to her husband? how was it that a great wall of division was daily growing up between them, and her Philip of other days becoming more and more visionary and indistinct, and in his place a bitter, sometimes almost morose man, who was often cross and harsh to his children, and from whom the twins sometimes shrank in their boisterous glee, which he would sharply reprove? Presently Mrs. Kingscote was roused from her dream by the sound of merry voices, and then Lena Adair and her own Alice appeared at the open window.

"Here is Alice, safe and sound, Mrs. Kingscote. She has been the belle of the flower-show. Come in; come in, Gilbert. My cousin, Gilbert Francis; soon to be a reverend clerk in holy orders, one day to be a very reverend dean, and another day, in the dim distance, a lord bishop of some diocese. Gilbert, this is Alice's mother, Mrs. Kingscote."

A tall man, whose age no one could have guessed from his appearance, advanced at Lena's bidding, and bowed gravely to Mrs. Kingscote in answer to his cousin's rattle.

"It was very kind of you to give Alice so much pleasure," Mrs. Kingscote said to Lena. "I am sure she must have had a charming day."

"Where is Christabel?" Lena asked. "I

never see her now; and I want both her and Alice to come to us on Monday. We are going to have tea in the garden, and those that like are to have a little archery. Gilbert's sister Bertha is with us, who is quite after Christabel's heart—so good and useful and clever; and if she did not make me feel so wicked and useless, I should be very fond of her myself."

"Go and call Christabel, Alice," said her mother; "she is in the dining-room with your father. Mr. Kingscote has been away for two days," she added, "and has only just returned. I believe Chrissie is presiding at his tea."

Alice departed to do her mother's bidding, and Lena chattered on, according to custom, while Gilbert Francis sat by, thinking that he was very tired and hungry, and hoping Lena would now proceed homewards, and give him the opportunity of getting his dinner. Mrs. Kingscote tried to draw him on to talk, but it seemed a hopeless task; and, indeed, where Lena was, other people had very little chance of a hearing.

"Every one was at the flower-show," she said, running over the names of all the people she had seen. "I sat by Mrs. Travers for a little while. She told me that sad story about Mr. Beresford's nephew. The Traverses seem to like him very much, and he was often at the vicarage. The eldest son heard the final quarrel at the office between the uncle and nephew, and

said one was white and the other crimson with rage. He is gone to the Brazils. Mr. Travers has given him letters of introduction to his brother, who is, I forget what, out there. What was it, Gilbert?"

"A coffee planter, perhaps," suggested her cousin, with a scarcely suppressed yawn.

"Oh, well, it does not signify; but he is gone to one end of the world, and his father to the other. Mrs. Travers says the father is the most dishonourable man, and has left heaps and heaps of debts behind him. He broke his first wife's heart, who was a gentlewoman, you know, and has broken many others since. He has taken no notice of this boy here for years; but when he handed him over to his uncle, it was with the promise that he would remunerate him for his schooling and so on; but he never has. He has married again, it seems; a common vulgar woman, who has some children. Ah! here is Christabel at last. Christabel, I want you to come to Abbot's Court on Monday, not to see me—I know that is no inducement—but to see Bertha Francis, my cousin, and this lazy man's sister, who is half asleep, or moralizing on the wickedness of the world in general and mine in particular. Now you are not to say no, Christabel, I can't allow it."

As she spoke, the lazy man drew his tall figure out of the depths of an easy-chair, and bowed in answer to his cousin's introduction.

He had been called upon several times that day to admire Alice, and to endorse Lena's opinion that she was a lovely girl. So she was, as far as outline of feature and grace and ease of movement went. She was in the dawning freshness of her early youth, very fair to look upon, and the lilac muslin which had cost so much thought became her admirably. So did the little white tulle bonnet which she and Christabel together had made out of materials hastily bought at a Bideford shop, and which Christabel, in default of a fresh artificial flower, or money to buy a new one, had ornamented at the last moment with clusters of yellow and white banksia roses. They were drooping and faded now, but they must have answered the desired end very well, as Lena's first exclamation had been, "Where did you get that pretty bonnet? it is far prettier than mine."

When Christabel appeared with her sister, and Gilbert saw her for the first time, there were no outward accessories to impress him. Her morning dress was only blue cotton, and she had no ornaments about her; her collar fastened with a small stud, and one little line of black velvet defining the outline of her delicate throat. Chignons were unknown in the days of which I write, and Christabel's gold coloured hair was gathered into a net, and fell in a heavy roll behind. At one glance Gilbert Francis took in that she was a woman to trust and rest upon; not a mere girl to

admire and compliment and bandy words with ; idle words, which fly like a shuttlecock, from mouth to mouth, but alas ! not altogether harmlessly—for the girl who indulges in them loses somewhat of her freshness every time, and takes something away from the brightness and purity of her maidenhood. An irresistible feeling of respect came over Gilbert Francis, as he looked at Christabel, and heard her voice, which was, that most excellent thing in woman, clear and soft and musical. "Yes, I will come," she said, with a bright smile, "if all things are propitious ; if not, Alice must come alone."

"My dear," her mother interposed, "you must go, it will do you good. She needs a little variety and change sometimes," Mrs. Kingscote added.

"Indeed, I have plenty of variety," said Christabel, with a merry laugh, "and as to change"—the laugh died away as she thought of what her father had just told her, and her sad and serious eyes seemed to contradict the smile upon her lips. There would be change soon for them all.

"Well, then, Christabel, you are to hold yourself engaged to come next Monday ; there are plenty of witnesses. Now, Gilbert, we shall be late for dinner."

"Half-past seven already, positively," said Lena, referring to her watch. "Papa will be tasting the sweets of hunger, and we shall get a scolding. Come, Gilbert." In another minute

Lena had fluttered away, and her grave sedate cousin had followed her.

"I hope you will go to Abbot's Court on Monday, Christabel," her mother said, when Alice had descanted a little on the flower-show, and the dresses she had seen there, and then went to see her father. "If it is a fine day it will be very pleasant; you will enjoy it, Christabel. What a strange manner Mr. Francis has," Mrs. Kingscote went on, as Christabel made no rejoinder; "I remember seeing his mother, who was once Mr. Adair's sister."

"Mamma," said Christabel at last, "Papa seems very much depressed and wretched; he thinks your letter to Sir Richard Talwyn ought to be written at once. Perhaps it will be quieter for you now than in the morning, and then there will be no haste about the post. Papa asked you to write, did he not?"

"Not this evening, but he mentioned it the other day; it is a very disagreeable necessity, but I suppose I must do it; perhaps the sooner the better."

"I think so, mother," and Christabel went to the writing-table and looked for a good sheet of paper and an envelope to match, which she laid ready for her mother.

"You were so unwilling the other evening, dear, to think of our being indebted to Sir Richard at all, and now you seem quite anxious that I should write, Christabel." Mrs. Kingscote spoke

in a deprecatory half fretful tone, and then almost immediately said, "But you are right, my dear, and the sooner the letter is written, the better. Not that it will bring much, I fear. Prosperous and rich people are so seldom willing or able to help their relations. Your father has some idea that my uncle Richard may give him some superintendence over his ships and cargoes. He has paid agents in Bristol and several ports. I do not understand these matters," poor Mrs. Kingscote said, with a weary sigh, as she braced herself to the business before her, and Christabel, standing by the window, saw that several sheets of the best note paper were sacrificed before her mother could settle satisfactorily the terms in which she should address Sir Richard Talwyn.

A thunder-storm cleared the atmosphere, and Monday was bright and fine with a cool refreshing breeze. For the time Christabel left her home cares behind her, and when the two sisters set out for Abbot's Court, the elder was as full of the anticipated pleasure as the younger. It was a great refreshment to leave the routine of her daily life for a few hours, not to feel herself responsible for the twins' misdemeanours, or for Katie's torn frocks, and to break away from the almost settled gloom which had gathered over the household. Since his return from Exeter Mr. Kingscote had shut himself up almost entirely in his study, had scarcely spoken a word when he met his family at meals, and was moody

and constrained in his manner towards his wife, sometimes forgetting himself in the presence of his children, and speaking harshly, and even unkindly to her.

Of all the troubles which fall upon us, the troubles which the loss of money brings are the hardest to bear, especially when the loss has been in a manner incurred by ourselves. Mr. Kingscote is not the only man who has writhed under the torture of feeling himself responsible for the vanishing away of that which would have provided for his children, and made the question of their education and start in life so easy, instead of so difficult to solve. He is not the only man who takes up such a trouble defiantly, and angrily reproaches himself in his inmost heart with a bitterness which, if it could be seen, would be found to exceed any which he hurls against those who are around him. A sorrow brought upon ourselves, and borne by ourselves, is indeed most terrible. It is very different with the arrows from God's quiver, which wound, and, at the same time, draw us to Him who smites, for healing. Many and many a stricken heart can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." The sting of such griefs has no poison in it, no bitterness which shall spoil the sweetness of our lives thenceforth.

Christabel and Alice went silently along the flowery lanes towards Abbot's Court. Now and then Christabel sang in a soft low voice a snatch

of a familiar tune, and gathered as she passed blossoms of wild rose and honeysuckle, and bunches of yellow ladies-fingers and deeply blue veronica. When the two girls were within sight of one of the gates of Abbot's Court, Alice broke the silence: "Do throw away those wild flowers, Chrissie, and put on your gloves; I expect there will be several people at luncheon, and we can be seen coming up the drive from the drawing-room window."

Christabel laughed; "I certainly cannot throw away my flowers," she said; "I think them much too beautiful, but I will make them safe in my band and then put on my gloves, if you wish it? But they must need a telescope to see from this distance if my hands are gloveless or not. What a pretty place Abbot's Court is!"

The park sloped upwards towards the house for three-quarters of a mile, and herds of deer were feeding under the stately trees, which were the pride of Abbot's Court. The house itself was a long low building, backed by a wooded hill, which seemed just now to be shadowing it pleasantly from the noon-day heat.

"There is Mr. Adair coming to meet us!" exclaimed Alice in some excitement, as the figure of a stout elderly man was seen crossing the lawn in front of the house, and bearing down towards the drive up which Alice and Christabel were making their way.

Mr. Adair was pompous and good-natured;

proud of his house, his grounds, his grapes, and his flowers; satisfied with everything that belonged to him because it was his, and never doubting that the perfection of all his surroundings was as clearly defined to others as to himself. It is needless to say that his only child, Eleanor, who had been early left motherless, shared in this universal satisfaction with all that belonged to him. Her father could see no fault in her, and a meek and gentle elderly cousin, who lived at Abbot's Court in the capacity of chaperone, had never dared to hint that Lena was capable of improvement; she would as soon have thought of hinting that the bunches of Black Hamburgs in the vinery, or the peaches and nectarines in the orchard-house, could be surpassed by those which any of the gardeners of the neighbouring gentry produced.

"Well, young ladies," was Mr. Adair's greeting. "You must have had a warm walk from Heatherington. It is a pity you did not drive. I would gladly have sent a carriage for you. Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote are well, I hope? Wonderfully early summer, is it not? Just as hot as ever, after the storm on Friday night."

There was always a touch of patronage in Mr. Adair's manner which jarred some chord in Christabel, and she was less a favourite at Abbot's Court than her younger sister, because her manner was less expressive of the admiration both father and daughter delighted in. Alice

had learned her lesson perfectly, and her little remarks from time to time, as they approached the house, were all directed in the right channel: "How beautifully smooth the lawn looks!" "How very early the flowers in the beds are!" and so on.

"Ah, yes," Mr. Adair would rejoin. "Scott is a wonderful genius with his bedding plants — manages to get them so well up before he turns them out. And such a judge of the weather, too! He said we were safe to have no frosts this May, and he has been right. Trust a Scotchman for being long-headed and weather-wise. But you must come and look at the azaleas; it was only yesterday Sir Robert Chesterfield said he never saw such blossoms, except at Chiswick. This way, Miss Kingscote, we can go through the conservatory into the house; and here is Scott himself to do the honours. Come, Scott, can you cut a little bouquet for these young ladies?"

The grave gardener turned at his master's voice from the contemplation of a magnificent rose-coloured azalea towards the visitors: "We don't mostly take flowers from this house, sir," he said in a slow deliberate voice. "There are plenty of geraniums and calceolarias in the other house, not to mention heliotrope and ferns, more suitable for bouquets; but if you wish ——"

"Oh, never mind—never mind," said Mr.

Adair, whose flowers were not his own in Scott's presence ; "tell Browne, or one of the under-gardeners, to send in a bouquet in the course of the afternoon for the Miss Kingscotes."

"Splendid show! isn't it?" he said, turning rather sharply on Christabel, who had left the admiration to Alice.

"Yes, the colours are beautiful ; but I am not quite sure that I care for the stiff training of the azaleas."

"Dear me, how very extraordinary! that is now the point—just the point to convey the idea of a mass of blossom. But we must really find my daughter ; she will not thank me for depriving her so long of your society."

"The rhododendrons on the terrace are very beautiful, I think," said Christabel, as, crossing the hall, through an open door the garden was seen, where a forest of these shrubs, now in full blossom, made a background of gorgeous colouring.

But Mr. Adair did not vouchsafe any rejoinder, and Lena now appeared, fluttering down the stairs, in her gauzy dress, and giving Alice a series of kisses, which were like a butterfly alighting on a flower ; Christabel received only one of the same kind, which not meeting with much response was not repeated.

"Do come up, and leave your hats in my room," she said ; "you must be tired if you walked from Heatherington. How stupid of me not to send the

pony-carriage ! Ah, Bertha ! I forgot you were here," she exclaimed, as she danced into a pretty gaily furnished room, from which her own bedroom opened. "Miss Francis, or Bertha the good ! Bertha—this is my friend Alice Kingscote, and her sister, Miss Kingscote, who won't let me be her friend, and is much more likely to be yours."

"You are accustomed to Lena's rattle, I see," said Bertha, holding out her hand to Christabel ; "so it makes very little impression on you," she added, with a smile.

Bertha Francis was lying on a sofa by the open window. She was a small plain woman of thirty, with hair, in which were many lines of gray, gathered back from her face, a face in which there were signs of suffering and pain, but which, when she smiled, seemed wholly transfigured and changed. For hers was a rare and beautiful smile—a light coming from nothing outward, but the reflection of a radiance which was from within.

"You will come down to luncheon, Bertha," Lena said ; "no one will be here but these two young ladies: the Lees and the Chesterfields and the Carews are coming to shoot this afternoon, and you can sit under the cedar tree, and watch us, and moralize, and agree with Gilbert that we do nothing but waste time here."

"I think, Lena, I will have my dinner here, if you don't mind," said Bertha. "It has been

rather a bad morning with me, and I don't quite feel as if I could get downstairs yet."

"Of course you shall have your luncheon here," said Lena; "I am so sorry you are in pain, dear old Bertha. I should go mad, or cut my throat, I do believe, if I were you."

"Hush, Eleanor, do not talk so; you would learn the lesson of patience as well as anyone if the need arose. But don't let me keep you. I heard the gong some minutes ago."

"She wants to get rid of us, you see," said Lena to Christabel, "so let us leave her in peace. You will come into the garden in the afternoon, Bertha; you shall sit on the terrace, and be as quiet as you like."

As Christabel was following her sister and Lena from the room, Bertha spoke, "I hope, Miss Kingscote, if you can spare half an hour from the archery, you will come and talk to me, whether I come down or not? Is it asking too much?" she questioned, with a half-doubtful smile.

But Christabel responded at once. She lingered a moment to say, heartily, "I do not care about archery, and I shall like much better to sit with you."

Christabel never felt quite at her ease at Abbot's Court, while Alice seemed in an atmosphere in which she flourished and expanded. The Adairs had not lived at Abbot's Court many years, as Mr. Adair had come into possession of the

property quite unexpectedly, by the death of a distant relation. The intimacy which had grown up between Alice and Lena had not extended to other members of the family. Mr. Adair looked upon the Kingscotes as people worth knowing, up to a certain point, because everyone knew that theirs was a good old family. But he saw that they had dropped out of the society of the neighbourhood, and discovered that he did not meet them at dinners and balls; so it was not incumbent on him to cultivate them as he did the wealthy squires and rich baronets who were scattered about the district; people who had their seats in parliament, and their London houses, and whose sons and daughters attended levees and drawing-rooms in due course.

Alice talked and chattered at luncheon, and Lena and she kept up a little war of words and light jests, to which the good cousin, Miss Griffiths, listened, in a bewildered maze, only thinking how different it was with girls in her young days; and Mr. Adair smiled and nodded, and told Lena she was a "saucy pussie," and made "Miss Kingscote look grave." Perhaps Mr. Adair was right; Christabel was, in her own mind, trying to solve the problem of Alice's gaiety abroad, and her silence and dullness at home. How often at the early dinners at Heatherington would one of those bright smiles have been a help! how often would it have made Christabel's task brighter if Alice

had done her part to enliven the too often silent meals, over which her father presided, while her mother, opposite to him, sat sad and anxious, repressing the younger children's mirth for her husband's sake, and wishing that Alice would rouse herself, and try to enter into some conversation which her father might be induced to join. But it had become a recognized fact in the Kingscote family, that Alice never disturbed herself, or put herself out of the way for others; that she was very pleasant and nice when she was pleased, and very much the reverse when things were not what she liked. Mr. Francis, who came into the room when luncheon was half over, thought the two sisters a great contrast to each other, and was not slow to see that Christabel was not enjoying herself as Alice did. When the guests arrived, about three o'clock, for archery, Gilbert Francis went up to his sister's room.

"Are you coming down?" he asked, in a tender, gentle tone; "there are a variety of young ladies in green and white, and poor little Lena is as silly as ever, infecting that pretty Miss Kingscote with her folly, whilst the elder sister seems to have no part or lot in it."

"Oh Gilbert," said Bertha, "it is she I want to get hold of; she looks so charming. Can you help me downstairs now, and establish me on the seat on the terrace, under the

tulip-tree, and then ask Miss Kingscote to come and see me?"

"All right," said her brother; "but, Bertha, are you worse to-day? is there anything fresh? You do not look well."

"No, it is nothing fresh," she answered, cheerfully; "only a bad fit of pain this morning, which set in about five o'clock, and did not stop till nearly twelve; but I am quite brisk now. Give me my hat, dear Gilbert, will you, and that shawl?"

Her brother obeyed, holding the shawl while his sister put on her hat, and looking round the room as he did so, he said, "This child knows how to deck out her room as well as herself. Not in bad taste either. Such nice pictures, and what a set out on the table—books and knick-knacks. But Lena is a spoiled child—frightfully spoiled. Now, are you ready?"

Bertha rose with difficulty from the sofa, and by the help of her brother's arm made slow progress downstairs. She was quite exhausted when she reached the desired seat under the tree; and Miss Griffiths, familiarly called "Cousin Nan," hastened to minister to her, by holding a bottle of very weak salts to her nose, and murmuring over her, "Poor dear! she is sadly out of health. I wonder, Gilbert, you allowed her to exert herself by coming down at all. It is a pretty sight to see the young people so happy. Miss Kingscote, your sister is a very good shot.

Have you noticed the elder Miss Lee? She is a very handsome girl. But I dare say you know her. She is in spotted muslin, with green bows."

Having uttered a few more commonplace remarks, Cousin Nan retired to the drawing-room, where she took a quiet nap in her favourite chair, waking herself with a jerk every five minutes, to pursue the crochet of an elaborate piece of work, intended to adorn the stall at a bazaar coming off at Bideford in the autumn, where Lena was to take an active part.

When her brother and Miss Griffiths were gone, Bertha made room for Christabel on the seat, and began to talk on such subjects as usually present themselves as topics at the beginning of an acquaintance. There were pauses sometimes, when the voices of those who were moving backwards and forwards between the targets were borne towards the terrace on the soft summer air. The targets were set up at the further end of the extensive lawn, and the girls' light dresses, with their ribbons fluttering in the breeze, gave it the appearance of a moving flower garden. Archery was in those days something of what croquet is in these; and there was no country-house of any pretension, especially where there were young people, which had not its ground and appliances for shooting.

"They look very pretty from here, do they not?" Bertha said after a pause; "do you not wish to go and join them?"

"No," Christabel answered, "I do not shoot well enough to care to exhibit in public. I have too many things to do at home to have time to practice much. Alice has a target, and Katie and Harold find it a great amusement."

"You are the eldest of a large family, I think?"

"Yes; I am the eldest of six. There were two more sisters, who died when they were babies. Have you any sisters?" she asked.

"None on earth," was the answer, "but two in heaven. Gilbert and I are alone in the world. He has just taken his degree, and will soon be ordained, I hope. Then, I may say, the one great desire of my life will be fulfilled. It was our mother's great desire too, and she will rejoice."

It was new to Christabel's ear to hear the dead spoken of as present, and there was altogether something in Bertha Francis which she felt she did not understand.

"Have you been ill long?" was her next question.

"All my life, more or less, but the last ten years I have been very helpless, and obliged to give up everything that calls for much exertion."

"It must be very hard," Christabel said, almost involuntarily, "I wonder how you can bear it."

"I have been a long time learning to bear it," Bertha said, with a smile, "and He who has taught me how to bear it, has been very patient with me. Now, I do believe I am happier, far

happier, than I could have been had I been strong and active."

To Christabel, in her health and strength, with all her keen delight in exertion and ministry upon others, this was a mystery.

"I don't understand that at all," she said, "but I know you must be very good, and you look so happy. I feel you mean what you say."

"That is a great compliment," Bertha said, with a gentle laugh, "I think I may return it as to the latter clause."

"I have been very happy," Christabel answered, understanding what Bertha intended to imply; "just now we have troubles, which press upon me. We are likely to leave our dear old home, and we are very poor, so poor that we shall have to think of every shilling we spend, and it is a sort of trial which is not elevating like some—like yours, for instance. At least, I find it very difficult to get on bravely, even in the country, with all the familiar things around me which I love, and I dare not think how it will be when we are amongst walls and chimney-pots, and shall perhaps scarcely see the sky. We shall most probably live in a great town. Mamma's uncle, Sir Richard Talwyn, if he helps us at all, will do it by giving my father some situation connected with his business as a merchant and shipowner, and we should have to live on the spot, perhaps in Bristol. Exeter would be bad

enough, but Bristol would be so much worse. I do not know why I should tell you all this," Christabel said, breaking off, "only my mind is so full of it ; and all the gaiety of my sister and Miss Adair, and all the luxuries and grandeur of Abbot's Court, make me dull, I scarcely know why. It is so very difficult to see the reason of things, and that any one so gentle and loving as my mother should have so much to bear, does seem hard. Then she is very far from strong, and I sometimes think all that is coming upon us will be too much for her. She came to Heatherington when she married ; we were all born there, and she clings to it for the sake of old memories, in a way, which I do not think my father understands."

"Men are spared that kind of clinging to places you mean," said Bertha ; "they are not troubled with the little associations with the past, which bind us women to the days that are no more. But you are young, and have the world before you : I should think too you are naturally buoyant and hopeful ; and you know whatever the storms of life, and whatever the rough waves which roll over our heads, there is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast."

Christabel did not answer, and Bertha went on, "That hope which maketh none ashamed ; that hope which lies between faith and love, and links them in a threefold cord, which earthly troubles fail to move if only we hold it fast."

"I suppose we all live in hope," Christabel said, "especially when we are young."

"But the only steadfast anchor must have its hold in nothing earthly. You must feel that the cord is made fast within the veil where He who is our hope is ascended, and where we must also try to ascend in heart and mind, and continually dwell, as we prayed we might do on Thursday."

"Thursday," Christabel repeated. "Oh, yes; I remember last Thursday was Ascension Day. I remember the collect for that day has the words in it you repeated just now; not that I was at church."

Then a long silence followed, and Bertha lay back on her cushion; and Christabel, seeing that she was tired, and disinclined to talk any more, rose presently and left her. Then she wandered away into the plantations behind Abbot's Court, and following a broad grassy path found herself at the end in an open space, where from an opening in the trees she caught a distant view of the blue sea, where the sails of two or three ships were shining with glistening whiteness in the afternoon light. Christabel sat down on a rustic seat, and Bertha's words still rang in her ears: "An anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast." Then her thoughts went over the sea, to a ship that had sailed out from Bideford a few days before, bearing away a young heart bent on active service and achievement. Almost

involuntarily her thoughts about St. Aubyn formed themselves into a prayer, that he might in all his wanderings have his hand upon the treble cord and find the anchor of the soul to hold by. Many long years after, when these words had come to be to Christabel something more than a pleasant song, the remembrance of the day when they had been spoken to her by Bertha came back with all the beauty and freshness of this May afternoon in Abbot's Court woods.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN ST. OGG'S HILL.

"Show me the path—I had forgotten Thee
When I was happy and free,
Walking down here in the gladsome light of the sun ;
But now I come and mourn.
O set my feet
In the road to Thy blest seat.
And for the rest, O God,
Thy will be done !"

JEAN INGELow.

WHEN the other guests had departed after tea and ice, which Mr. Adair liberally dispensed, remarking several times that an ice-house in the country was indispensable in hot weather, Christabel and Alice Kingscote were left alone in the drawing-room, while Lena disappeared to make some change in her dress for the seven o'clock dinner.

"How delightful it is here," Alice said. "I can't think how it is you are so dull to-day, Christabel. Why did you not come on the lawn instead of moping on the terrace with that poor

old Miss Francis and Cousin Nan? Then you made off by yourself. Gertrude Lee noticed you, and asked if you were always as demure as that—preferring spinsters and solitude to girls of your own age! Even Mr. Francis laughed—although I don't think he liked his sister to be called an old maid. Christabel, what are you thinking about?"

Christabel, thus appealed to, turned round with some sharpness upon her sister: "It would not do, Alice, if we both talked at once; and I think to-day you have done all that was necessary for yourself and me too—perhaps a little more. I am sure mamma would say you were rather too much at home and at your ease here."

"Would she?" was Alice's rejoinder. "I hate precise people. I would rather see a girl like Lena Adair than that proud Mabel Carew any day. But I believe, Chrissie, you are jealous when you see me so happy, and would like me to lead that hum-drum life at home for ever."

"There is no chance of that," said Christabel, "We shall soon have a very different home to Heatherington; and with all that lies before us it is difficult to be really light-hearted."

Alice's rejoinder was prevented by Lena's return, and soon after Mr. Adair joined them with Gilbert Francis and Miss Griffiths. Then dinner was announced, and Christabel was taken, with

much pompous courtesy, into the dining-room by her self-satisfied host.

"Papa," said Lena, before they left the table, "I want Daphne put into the basket-carriage, and Gilbert will drive the Miss Kingscotes home. We can take a turn by the upper road, and come down St. Ogg's Hill to Heatherington. It will be delightful after the heat of the day."

"Very well," was Mr. Adair's answer. "I suppose Gilbert is to be trusted as charioteer, eh, Gilbert?"

"Oh, yes! I have driven Daphne several times," said Gilbert, twisting a vine leaf in his fingers. "Lena, however, is too good a whip to need any help."

"Ah! but I am going to be lazy to-night, and sit in the back seat with Alice, and leave you two sedate people to yourselves." Then rising she bent over her father's chair and kissed him, giving his bald head a little pat, and saying, "I won't let Gilbert upset us and kill me, dear dad. You won't get rid of me in a hurry. Now, Gilbert, I can only give you ten minutes for your claret this evening."

In another half-hour Bertha Francis from her window watched the departure of the pony-carriage. Daphne, a pretty bay mare, arched her neck and was a little impatient of delay; Gilbert took the reins, and Christabel looked up with a bright smile of good-bye, while Lena and Alice waved their hands to Mr. Adair and Miss

Griffiths, who were standing at the door, and uttering some words of caution: "for Daphne seems fidgety this evening," were Mr. Adair's last words.

"By-the-by, Brown," he called to the retreating groom, "I think you may as well take the short cut over the park towards Heatherington, and attend Miss Adair and Mr. Francis on their return home." "For it is just as well to be on the safe side," he said to himself as he went back to the *Times*, and Miss Griffiths to her crochet; while Bertha Francis, from her post of observation, followed the pony-carriage down the drive with her eyes, and recalling Christabel's conversation with her that afternoon, felt a strong wish to see her again, and know her better.

For some minutes Gilbert Francis and Christabel were silent. The talk rested between the two girls in the back seat, who seemed to find endless topics of conversation, and laughed and chatted merrily.

"This is a pretty country," Gilbert said at last. "I must try to get to Lundy Island from Clovelly some day. Have you ever been there?"

"Oh yes; several times. It is very rough landing even in calm weather," Christabel answered; "and I am not sure that Lundy is not one of those friends who are best at a distance."

"That is an odd definition, and not complimentary to those friends to whom you intend to point your comparison. This horse fidgets

dreadfully," he continued, "and gives me no peace. Lena, Daphne is in a very contrary humour."

"Is she?" was the reply; "it is because she is in bad hands then."

"But, Miss Kingscote," Mr. Francis continued, "explain yourself about Lundy Island and friends; why are both best at a distance?"

"I did not say all friends; I mean, that Lundy's roughnesses and inaccessible points add to its beauty, as they take all the varieties of light and shadow, but when it comes to approaching it from a boat, the said roughnesses are forbidding, and one longs for the soft touch of trees and verdure, which are not missed at a distance."

"Oh, I see! well I dare say there is some truth in your statement, and in the simile you were pleased to make also. From the brow of St. Ogg's Hill we shall have a magnificent view this evening. I am soon going to be buried in a city—a very dirty untaking city too—so I had better make the most of all beautiful and pleasant things while I can; don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Christabel, turning towards him; "I can sympathize with you, for I soon expect to live in a town too, and leave all this dear North Devonshire far behind. Very good and wise people say, place makes no difference, and we can be happy everywhere and anywhere."

"Good and wise people are very tiresome then

and very stupid," Gilbert rejoined ; " I deny that place makes no difference ! God's finger on earth is rather better than man's. Now, with that view within reach I never could be wretched long ; but hemmed in by factory chimneys and blackened walls I could get into the blues often enough."

They were at the top of St. Ogg's Hill now, and the panorama of sea and sky and circling hills was before them, glowing in the western light, earth and sea melting in the horizon to one in golden haze.

" Stop, Daphne, don't be in such a hurry ; you are a horrible nuisance, I must say."

But Daphne chafed and pawed the ground, and resisted Gilbert's restraining hand as he tried to bring the carriage to a full stop on the brow of the hill. Just then a sheep-dog leaped through the hedge in front of the horse, not many yards from her head, and with a desperate bound Daphne darted down the hill, evidently no longer in the least under Gilbert Francis' control.

" Pull her in, Gilbert !" Lena exclaimed, rising from her seat and leaning over her cousin's shoulder. " Oh ! pull her in ! "

" Sit still, Lena," Gilbert said, sternly ; " do not attempt to move."

But Lena had no self-possession, and Alice, following her example, also stood up and exclaimed in terror, " Oh what shall we do ? what shall we do ? shall we jump out ? "

"Sit still!" Gilbert said again.

"Sit still, Alice," Christabel repeated; "it is safer to be quiet." She was quiet herself, but she saw and measured their great peril. The road after the descent of St. Ogg's Hill rose gently on the opposite side of the valley, and then turned sharply to the right towards Heatherington. If Daphne did not slacken her pace as she went up the hill, and took that corner at her present speed the carriage must be overturned. All this passed with instantaneous quickness through Christabel's mind. Looking at Gilbert's profile, which was fixed and rigid, she saw he too understood the danger which threatened. They had dashed down the hill at an amazing pace, and Daphne was now tearing up the slight ascent before them at full speed.

"The road turns to the right," Gilbert said, "just by that tree—does it not?"

"Yes," she said; "and it is a sharp turn."

"I must try to check her, but we must go over, even if I succeed. Are you frightened?" He gave her one glance, her face was calm but very pale. Even one word of reply was impossible, for with panting breath, and reeking sides the horse suddenly bounded across the road, and rushed into the thick of the high hedge, upsetting the carriage and throwing those who were in it with great force to the ground. Alice was the first to regain her feet, and Christabel, as she raised herself from under the carriage, felt a

throb of thankfulness when she saw her sister unharmed. But Lena—gay, laughing Lena—lay quite still on the other side of the road ; and Mr. Francis' voice was heard calling for help.

"I cannot move," he said, "the wheel presses on my leg. Are you all safe?"

It was Christabel who answered, "Alice and I are safe, but Lena does not move ; can I help you?"

His voice, in reply, expressed the pain, which he did not put into words. "Can you call for assistance ; if the horse moves I may be crushed."

Assistance ! oh that she could find it ! but those North Devonshire roads are little frequented, and Christabel looked up and down in vain. "We are not a quarter of a mile from home," she said. "Alice, Alice, one of us must try to run there ; shall it be you or me?"

"Oh ! I dare not be left alone here," said Alice, who was bending over poor Lena.

"Then you must run home as fast as possible," said Christabel, decidedly ; "you must go at once, Alice, or I must," seeing Alice hesitate. "That lane will take you straight to the lower gate of Heatherington. Alice, either go at once, or let me go."

Alice burst into tears, and protested that she would go, only her legs trembled so she could scarcely stand. Anything, however, was better than to be left alone, and Alice set off.

It was very strange that Daphne did not move, her head was buried in the hedge, and her hind legs were raised; one shaft had snapped off the carriage as it overturned, and it now lay on its side, Mr. Francis fast imprisoned beneath it. Christabel was powerless to help, and the moments seemed hours as she watched her sister's figure turn the corner and disappear down the lane to the right. Just as Alice was fairly out of sight the sound of wheels was heard, and Christabel saw a carriage coming down St. Ogg's Hill. The drag was on, and the pair of horses descended more slowly and surely than poor Daphne had done. But Christabel, to whom the delay of drawing up the drag at the foot of the hill seemed interminable, waved her handkerchief and held up her arm to attract the attention of the coachman and another man on the box. As the carriage deliberately crept up the road, Christabel ran towards it. She saw it was a hired conveyance from Bideford, and at the sound of her voice an elderly man, with a sharp thin face, put his head out of the window.

"What does she say? eh! an accident? Roper"—to his servant, who was mounted on the box by the phlegmatic coachman—"Roper, what does she say?"

"Oh! will you help me?" Christabel entreated; "this pony-carriage has been overturned, and there is a gentleman lying under it,

and a young lady very much hurt, too. Oh ! will you help me ?”

“Of course we will. Roper, get down instantly, and open the door for me. Dash these hired carriages ! how the door sticks !” and the old gentleman pounded at it as he spoke till he was red in the face.

Roper, meanwhile, had dismounted, and showed himself to be at once equal to the emergency of opening the door and calming his master's excitement. “Gently, Sir Richard, or you'll burst the panel.”

Sir Richard struggled out, and the coachman having turned his horses' heads to the hedge, where they were quite content to nibble the grass and ferns, stumped up to the pony-carriage. “Lor bless us, dear heart ! what a situation for the beast ! she is like a stuck pig in the hedge. Here, you young man,” he continued, addressing Mr. Roper—whose opinion of North Devon manners was from that moment very poor—“Here, let us see if we can pull her out !”

“Take care, take care !” Christabel exclaimed, “if the horse moves the gentleman must be hurt : he is lying with the wheel upon his leg.”

“Move !” exclaimed the old coachman, who had by this time braved the danger, and had clambered up the hedge to get a view of Daphne's head ; “move, bless us and save us ! she is as dead as a door nail.”

“Not a bit of it, not a bit of it,” said his

master, who had directed his attention to Lena, "she is only fainting."

"Fainting! did ever you hear the like! when the poor dumb thing is dead, and a valuable beast she be, as pretty a bay mare as you'll see in all the county, she be."

"Come, come, coachman," said Roper, "leave your moralizing, and help me to give the vehicle a shove; we'll disentangle you, sir, in a minute."

"Thanks," said Mr. Francis; "the sooner the better."

The voice was fainter than it had been five minutes before, and when at last Mr. Francis was dragged out from his uncomfortable position, he was all but insensible. Lena had been by this time lifted by Sir Richard into the carriage, and now he inquired of Christabel where he should drive.

"Oh! to Heatherington, please; it is not a quarter of a mile from here, and Abbot's Court is ——"

But the gentleman interrupted her. "Heatherington, Heatherington! Why, I am going to Heatherington House. Is your name King-scote?"

"Yes," said Christabel, the truth flashing upon her; "and you are, I suppose, Sir Richard Talwyn?"

"Of course I am; of course I am! but we must lose no time in getting these poor people attended to. Is this your sister, this pretty creature?"

Upon my word, I wish she would open her eyes ; it is an uncommon long faint. Now then, Roper," and by slow degrees Gilbert Francis was lifted into the carriage ; and once or twice a suppressed exclamation of pain showed what the movement cost him. Just as the carriage was moving the desired help came from Heatherington. Mr. Kingscote and old Joseph, with a labouring man from the farm, were seen coming towards them.

Poor Daphne needed no help ; she was indeed, as Joseph said, past hope, and as "dead as a door nail." Joseph and the labourer were left debating as to what should be done with the carriage and poor Daphne, while Mr. Kingscote directed his attention to Mr. Francis and Lena.

"Now then," said Sir Richard, "we must get them to your house as soon as possible. You do not know me then ? It is some years since we met, Philip Kingscote."

Mr. Kingscote replied coldly, "I did not expect to meet Sir Richard Talwyn in a Devonshire lane ; it must be my excuse for not at once recognizing him."

"A letter from your wife, sir, brought me from Ilfracombe, where some of my family have a house this summer, as I thought you might desire some conversation with me. But at present we can only think of these poor people. We had better drive on at a gentle pace, Roper. I am afraid you are in great pain," he said, addressing Gilbert Francis. "This is a deplorable

accident, and a very extraordinary one too. The poor horse belonged to you, did it?"

Christabel, seeing that Gilbert could not reply to those questions, told her uncle what details she could, as the carriage moved on at a foot's pace towards Heatherington, Mr. Kingscote and Roper walking by it on either side. Christabel noticed that her father's head was more proudly carried than usual, and his manner to Sir Richard Talwyn was anything but conciliatory, or likely to win consideration from him.

Mr. Kingscote was standing at the door with the children round her when the carriage drove up to it. Lena was laid upon one sofa in the drawing-room, and Gilbert on another. The groom, who had been sent from Abbot's Court by Mr. Adair, had gone back there to summon him, and to see that a messenger was despatched to Northam and Bideford for a surgeon. In all this trouble and confusion, and the anxiety about Lena, Mrs. Kingscote was quite unconscious of her uncle's presence. They had not met for many years, and both were changed: the one by time and adversity, and the other by time and prosperity.

The efforts to restore Lena were at last successful, and before her father arrived she was able to speak. Of Mr. Francis' state it was difficult to judge; he said nothing, but was evidently in great pain. Even in his excitement and anxiety, Mr. Adair, when he did arrive, could not forget

to be pompous and grand. He was condescending in his thanks to Sir Richard Talwyn for the assistance he had rendered ; profuse in his apologies to Mrs. Kingscote for the trouble they had caused ; while he bent over his daughter and assured her she would soon be all right, and did not look so pale even now as her friend Alice, who was kneeling by the sofa, still trembling in every limb.

When the Northam surgeon came, he declared that Miss Adair might safely be moved to Abbot's Court ; but that the gentleman's leg was fractured : and he thought Mr. Smith, to whom he deferred as a superior authority, would when he arrived from Bideford, agree with him that there must be as little delay as possible in discovering the full extent of the fracture, and setting the bone.

"But I would rather be removed to Abbot's Court," Gilbert said, faintly. "I *can* bear it, and I shall be a nuisance here."

"Nonsense, my dear sir," said Sir Richard ; "you must submit to the doctor's orders. I am sure Mrs. Kingscote will agree with me. Emily," he continued, "I am right, am I not ?"

Mrs. Kingscote, who had scarcely noticed Sir Richard's presence, except as the owner of the carriage which had brought the sufferers to Heatherington, now turned towards him, a bright colour rising to her face, and making her look almost as young as Christabel. "Uncle Richard !"

she exclaimed ; " I beg your pardon. I have been so engrossed with all that has happened, I never once thought of you. How is it you are here ? Philip," to her husband, " this is my uncle Richard."

" Yes, yes ; he knows all about it. I got your letter at Ilfracombe, and thought I would come over here and talk it over with you. I have taken rooms at the Dolphin at Bideford for the night, and shall drive back there when this matter is settled. Ah ! she is better now—that pretty little creature. Your own girls are safe, Emily, and seem none the worse for the accident. You may thank God for that."

Lena, though now able to sit up, was a good deal shaken ; and smiles and tears followed each other in quick succession when she assured her father she was all right now, only she should dream of that awful rush down hill ; and it would make her shudder all her life when she thought of it. " Was it not terrible, Alice ? "

" Don't talk of it, my darling," said her father ; " it is not good for either you or Miss Kingscote. I wonder if Mrs. Kingscote will consent to your friend returning with you to Abbot's Court. May I ask such a favour ? " he said, turning to Mrs. Kingscote.

Alice sprang up at once. " Oh mamma ! let me go."

So it was arranged, and before the Bideford surgeon had arrived Lena and Alice were safely

in the close carriage which had brought Mr. Adair, and were returning to Abbot's Court under his care.

Mr. Smith came at last, and was of opinion that Mr. Francis had better remain where he was ; and, indeed when he made an attempt to move, a deadly faintness seemed to come over him ; and the exertion of being carried upstairs, which was effected by Roper and the doctors, was almost more than he could bear. Mrs. Kingscote nerved herself to what was before her, and remained with Gilbert during the operation ; while Christabel, after despatching her young brothers and sister to bed, returned to the drawing-room, where her father was striding up and down, and Sir Richard was lying back in an easy-chair, his legs crossed, and his hands clasped in the attitude of a man entirely master of himself and of the occasion.

"Is that you, at last, Christabel?" her father said. "This is a very inconvenient episode just now : this man quartered on us for weeks, while the house can hardly be called home now. But it is like my fortune," he added, bitterly. "Is your mother with Mr. Francis?"

"Yes, papa," said Christabel ; "I am only afraid it will be too much for her." Then rallying herself, she said, "Shall I get you some coffee, Sir Richard?"

"Well, upon my word, it would be very acceptable, my dear ; but no one seems to be

thinking about you. You must be as shaken by that scamper downhill as anyone."

"I am tired, that is all," was the answer. "I will get you some coffee."

"Roper is upstairs, I suppose. I don't wish to hurry him ; but we must think of our long drive through the winding lanes to Bideford. That is a nice girl of yours, Kingscote," Sir Richard said, as Christabel left the room. "Very like what her poor mother was."

"You are profuse in your expressions of pity," said Mr. Kingscote, testily. "I am quite aware of all I have brought upon Emily, without being reminded of it. But to go back to what we were saying,—I shall be glad to accept your offer of the house in Bristol ; and as to the business part, I believe I have sense enough to look after it : superintend a dozen clerks at the wharf, and give my attention to the cargoes of West India sugar and other produce. I have got hold of the right word at last, have I not ?"

"I tell you what, Kingscote," said Sir Richard, "if you are too proud to accept my offer, refuse it ; but if you do accept it, be a little more gracious about it. When I read poor Emily's letter, I said to myself, 'It comes at the very nick of time,' as I have just lost by death the man who filled the situation at Bristol I offer you. I have a house in Adelaide Square, which happens to be vacant—has been vacant for some time now—the locality is out of favour. Even

the shopkeepers live in Clifton—creep up the side of the hill like so many ants after the day's labour."

Mr. Kingscote had never stopped his restless pacing to and fro while Sir Richard was speaking, but he now stood before him, and said, "You, with your million of money, don't understand the hardships of a man like me. But I would not be ungracious or wanting in courtesy, and I scarcely know how to pull on at all as I am. So I accept your offer with thanks. I will serve you to the best of my ability."

"It puzzles me to think how you could have come to such a strait, upon my word it does. This was a pretty little estate once, and when poor Emily married it was thought a good match for her, I remember."

The objectionable adjective sent Mr. Kingscote off on his pedestrian excursion again, and Sir Richard continued, "I expect you let the small coins slip away, and so by degrees the larger ones followed. This payment of the security you were fool enough (excuse the word) to enter into, and the Cornish mines, need not have brought you to this. I expect, Kingscote, neither you nor Emily, poor thing! were practical people, just easy-going, and fancying that sovereigns grew in the hedges. Ah," said Sir Richard, "this is a world where if we would reap we must sow; or rather, reap *as* we sow! You talk of my wealth—I have made it."

"I know it," was the answer; "and your lady brought some of it!" The tone was very satirical.

"I don't deny it, sir," said Sir Richard, drawing himself up from his chair; "and I don't wish to deny it. Lady Talwyn was an heiress in her own right, and I was lucky enough to win her."

Mr. Kingscote's lip curled as he recalled Lady Talwyn, the heiress of a tallow merchant's wealth; strong in the possession of satins and pearls, but very weak in her English grammar and her aspirates; a good-natured vulgar woman, who had none of the advantages of education which in these days—but not when Lady Talwyn was young—money can procure for the children of all kinds and degrees, the heiresses of tallow merchants no less than of peers.

The coffee had been drunk, and Sir Richard's watch consulted many times, before the drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Kingscote came in. "It is all well over now," she said, "and he has borne it wonderfully; but it was a terrible fracture. The leg was crushed by the wheel of the carriage."

"Come, my dear; come and sit down; you look quite tired out," said Sir Richard. "Is Roper ready? for I think I must be returning to Bideford. That precious vehicle from the Dolphin will be coming to grief if we are benighted on the way back. Dear, bless me! it

is near half-past ten now. Please order the carriage round, Christabel. An unusual name that ; but I am inclined to like it for your sake, my dear."

"I have been explaining my views to your husband, Emily," he continued, turning to Mrs. Kingscote ; "he will tell you all about it. Let me have an answer—a definite answer, at Ilfracombe in a day or two. We shall not be at Bishop's Stoke again for some weeks. We are going to town on the third of next month. It is an unfortunate thing for you, Emily, having this young man on your hands at this time ; but these things can't be helped. He will be able to be moved in a fortnight, I dare say. Good-bye," for Mr. Roper came to the door to announce that the carriage was ready. "Good-bye, and I hope we may meet again before long. Bishop's Stoke is only a few miles from Bristol, and if your good husband accepts my proposal, you can come out and see us—a nice change from Adelaide Square. Good-bye, my dear, give me an uncle's kiss, Christabel."

Christabel obeyed, and as she did so Sir Richard said, "I have two girls, whom I hope you will know some day. Take care of your mother. Good-bye."

Then he was gone, and scarcely had the sound of the carriage wheels died away, when others were heard approaching. It seemed as if the excitement of that evening was never to end.

"Who can it be?" Mrs. Kingscote said, as she lay back, pale and tired, on the sofa. "Who can it be?"

Christabel ran into the hall, and there met Bertha Francis. She had no strong arm to support her now, and leaned on a crutch. Her gentle voice won Mrs. Kingscote at once, for she had followed Christabel into the hall, and her first thought had been that Gilbert Francis's lame sister would only add to her care, and be another to nurse.

"I could not help coming," Bertha said; "I hope you will forgive me, but I feel as if I could not be separated from Gilbert now, and he will like me to be with him. May I go to him?"

She turned towards the wide staircase as she spoke, and Christabel held out her arm, while Mrs. Kingscote said, "If you are equal to the effort, my dear, I am very glad you should be with your brother. I had intended keeping watch to-night myself."

"But I am sure it is better you should not do so," Bertha answered, "and as you were so kind as to allow your daughter to return to Abbot's Court with Lena, my coming is only an exchange, is it? You must not judge of my strength by the slowness of my ascent. Stairs are my great difficulty in life. I can do anything with my hands, and on even ground I can be active with my feet too."

They were at the door of Gilbert's room, and Bertha paused. "It was a wonderful preserva-

tion for you all," she said, taking Christabel's hand in hers ; "I must try to think of that and give thanks, and not dwell too much on the pain and disappointment it will cause him, for this will delay his Ordination."

Then Mrs. Kingscote went with Bertha into her brother's room, and Christabel returned to her father. She found him in the library, as she knew she should, leaning over his desk.

"Well, this is a pretty business for us! two doctors in attendance, and a second invalid coming, I find, to wait on the first. If Mr. Adair's horse chooses to fly off at a tangent, and die in the hedge, I confess I think he ought to bear the brunt of it. The man would have been better looked after at Abbot's Court, and he should have been taken there at once."

"But, papa, the distance was so much further there, than here, and Lena Adair was insensible, and we were all so frightened, what could we do? We were only three or four minutes from home, and if we had gone back to Abbot's Court it would have taken such an immense time to get up St. Ogg's Hill."

"Well, well, that may be, but why did not those doctors get Francis back to Abbot's Court, and set the limb there? We shall have apothecaries dancing attendance here for the next two months, and they will call on me to pay their bills, I dare say."

"Papa, how absurd! I am sure you are not in earnest."

"All I can say is, Christabel, I have troubles enough of my own just now, without other people's being forced upon me. However, we leave this place in two months, and Mr. and Miss Francis will have to move before then. And what did they take little Alice off for? The child looked more pale and shattered than any of you. They like her at Abbot's Court because she is ornamental—a little more so than the lady who is come here as an exchange."

"Oh papa!" said Christabel, reproachfully, putting her arm gently round his neck, as she stood behind.

"Yes, I dare say," he answered, interpreting the tone of his daughter's voice; "I dare say you think me very hard and unsympathising. I was not always so, Christabel, but I am soured by perpetual disappointment and humiliation: think what it is for me to have to ask favours of that old man who was here this evening—your mother's uncle."

"I like Sir Richard much better than I expected I should," said Christabel; "he really is kindhearted, I think; and, you know, he need not do anything at all for us unless he chose."

"He is as rich as Cræsus; he might have offered me double the income he did, and not have missed it."

"I don't think you would have liked it if he had; that would have been taking a favour from him then; but if you give him your time and

your ability, and he pays you for it, you are equal. Papa, you must not give up hope; in a few years we shall come back to dear Heatherington, and Harold will be a clever man, and the twins doing something for themselves too by that time."

"Poor things, poor things!" her father repeated, returning her kiss affectionately. "Good-night, Chrissie; and Christabel," he called to her as she was leaving the room, "don't let your mother sit up all night with that hero with the broken leg. It is no use her wearing herself out."

Christabel was quite of that opinion, and on going to her mother's room was relieved to find her there already, preparing to go to bed.

"This has been a trying and exciting day, dear, but let us thank God you are safe, my darling, and Alice too. It might have been so different. Miss Francis would not let me sit up. The doctor has given her brother a composing draught, and he is asleep now. She is lying on the sofa in his room. It was a dreadful operation, Christabel, and the suffering must have been intense, but he bore it wonderfully. Both the doctors say they never saw such heroism, for getting the trowsers away from the leg must have been agony. The great fear is lest inflammation should set in in the knee; but Mr. Smith hopes extreme quiet may prevent this; he will be here early in the morning. Susan has offered to get up at four o'clock, and relieve Miss Francis, if she wishes it."

"Don't you like her, mamma?" asked Christabel. "I do so much, so very much. I think she is so good too. Mamma," Christabel continued, "I think Miss Francis is one of those people to whom religion is a reality, not a sort of Sunday business connected with church once a week, and forgotten till Sunday comes again! Mother, it must make a great difference in life when one has grasped the anchor of the soul. Don't you think so?"

"Ah! Christabel, in my young days I had a clearer perception of what you mean than I have now. The cares of the world, though not the deceitfulness of riches, have choked the good seed. Oh Christabel, I have so sadly failed in my duty to you children; somehow I have got so lax and careless about the best things."

"Dear mother, I am glad we can talk to each other as we do—you and I; perhaps we may help each other too,"—Christabel's voice sank to the gentlest whisper—"to think more of God: perhaps He is going to lead us to Him by a rugged way, because we would not go by a smooth one."

Mrs. Kingscote stroked back Christabel's hair, and kissed her fondly. "My child, I hope yours, please God, may not be a rugged path. You always try to smooth mine, and may God bless you for it."

Happy mother and daughter! thus friends and companions to each other, sharing joys and

sorrows together. Why, why is this union so rare? why, why is it that so many girls seek any friend for their confidence rather than their mother? that they even have secrets apart from her—pleasures, interests, and hopes and fears? There must be a fault somewhere, or this sort of tacit alienation would not be so common as it is. There is no love like the love of a mother; other ties may be multiplied, other affections be deep and strong, but once, only once, can we know a mother's love. Strong, faithful, and enduring, it has been chosen by the Fountain of wisdom and knowledge as a type even of His own. And when the time comes, be it in childhood, early youth, or in maturer years, that a mother is no longer ours on earth, then the colour of life changes for us henceforth; then a barrier seems raised between us and the past; then do we learn, if never before, the full depth of that love which was ours in our cradle, and, with its ready sympathy, ours also in every exigency of life; then do we learn, if never before, that that loss is one which cannot be repaired, that a blank place is left in our hearts which cannot be filled again till time shall be no more.

Christabel was, as she had told Sir Richard, very tired, but when she found herself alone in her own room she could not go to bed. She opened her window, and sat down before her elm tree, and looked up through the new full foliage to the stars, as she had done so many times

before. Still these words would keep up a chime in her ear, "an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast." Surely it was that which she needed, that her mother needed, that they all needed. Surely if they had that anchor to hold by, the waves and storms of life would not be so much dreaded. She went over again that rush down St. Ogg's Hill, and, like Lena, she was conscious that she shivered with fear as she did so. It might have been death to one or more of them, when poor Daphne, in her desperation, flung herself into the hedge. And if it had been death to her—sudden, fearful, instant death—where would she have been the next moment? The thought was full of terror to her; she knew and felt it. But why dismiss it and try to forget it all, as Mr. Adair had counselled his daughter to do? Since the voyage must be made, and danger might arise at any moment, would it not be better to feel the anchor was made fast, and that she had grasped the cord which bound her to it, with unwavering firmness?

Long did Christabel sit and muse that summer night, and at last she left her seat by the window, and took from its hiding-place St. Aubyn's Bible. She turned over the leaves with a gentle hand, not knowing exactly what she sought, her eyes wandering over the pages, and attracted now and then by the pencil-marks left there by St. Aubyn's mother. At last she found the very words that Bertha Francis had repeated to her, marked too

by that same hand. They seemed to look at her from the page, and stand out with peculiar meaning and power. A great longing and desire to realize them as her own came over Christabel. She took a pencil and marked the words again, writing her initials beneath on the blank margin; then she bent her young head and prayed, as she had never done before; and, refreshed and strengthened, she was soon wrapt in the soft deep sleep of youth.

CHAPTER V.

THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW LIFE.

“None are so blest
But something fails them.
In the garden gay
We miss the wayside flowers that we love best ;
And they who round their brow the jasmine wreath,
And pluck the orange bloom, may sigh to breathe
The scent of dewy cowslips far away.”

THE light summer rain fell thick and fast on the morning when Christabel and her father went out together, on their visit of exploration to Bristol. The offer made by Sir Richard Talwyn had been accepted. Heatherington was let for a term of years, and it now only remained to effect the removal of the whole family to Bristol as quickly as possible.

It was necessary that the house in Adelaide Square should be seen, and the probable amount of furniture necessary for it calculated by an experienced eye. It was, however, impossible that Mrs. Kingscote could leave Heatherington while Gilbert Francis and his sister were there ;

"and for all practical purposes you will do as well as I should," Mrs. Kingscote had said, "better perhaps, dear Christabel ; and your father will like you to be with him ; you understand him so well, and can encourage him and cheer him better than I can."

The sigh which followed these words went to Christabel's heart. Was it always so, she thought, that adversity separated husband and wife, instead of drawing them nearer to each other—could it ever be so in her own case ? It seemed to her, as to many another maiden who is dreaming her first dream of love, so utterly impossible : but, alas ! added years teach us all, sometimes, so many hard lessons, the hardest, perhaps, those which we learn by the discovery of our own weakness, and our own falling short of the ideal of our youthful visions. Truly may it be said, that the rough experiences of life often show us that we are not what we seemed to others, or believed ourselves to be.

A wet day is never cheery for a journey, and Christabel felt her spirits sink as she crossed the many-arched Bideford bridge. The coach crept up the steep hill out of the town and took the road to Barnstaple under a leaden sky and silent ceaseless rain. Then it was trying to have as a fellow-passenger Miss Rachel Beresford, who, when she had subsided at last from her numerous anxieties about her boxes, bags, and parcels, was determined to talk, and to be, as she said afterwards,

perfectly at her ease with the Kingscotes. It was useless for Mr. Kingscote to ignore her presence and answer her perpetual questions with stiff cold replies. Miss Rachel was not to be baffled, and she talked on with the utmost self-complacency on every possible subject.

"It will be a great loss when you leave Heatherington; I am sure, Christabel, I shall never care to go near the place. My brother knows Mr. Henderson's nephew very well; so we must call, I suppose, on his bride, but I shall quite dislike it; as I told John only this morning, new friends can never be like old ones, and I have known you all your life, you know. What a curious thing it is, my dear, this gentleman being laid up in your house; so inconvenient too just at this time. I did hear he was engaged to Miss Adair, his cousin, of Abbot's Court; and then, again, somebody contradicted it. They said Mr. Francis was going to be a clergyman, and was too High Church in his views to marry. How long is he likely to stay at Heatherington?"

"I don't know," Christabel answered; "I suppose till Mr. Smith thinks it safe for him to move."

"But you are leaving early in August, I heard," Miss Beresford persisted.

"We have fixed no time yet; it may be then or it may be later."

"And how will you bear living in Bristol? you who are so fond of the country!" Miss

Beresford pursued. "I don't think I could exist in a town, much less in a dirty, smoky city like Bristol. Only think what the smuts and the blacks will be there! why, my dear, it will be impossible to keep curtains clean a day, and as to collars and sleeves, it will cost a fortune for washing! I only hope you will all have your health there."

Christabel glanced nervously from time to time at her father's profile, and saw his brow knitted more ominously every minute. It was certainly singularly bad taste in Miss Rachel Beresford to enlarge on the miseries of Bristol life, since it was through her brother's instrumentality the Kingscotes were obliged to take up their abode there; but Mr. Kingscote thought Miss Rachel beneath any rejoinder, and kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the newspaper in his hands. At Barnstaple the coach was exchanged for the railway, and here absorbed, on the platform, with the troubles incident on her numerous packages, Miss Beresford was separated from the Kingscotes.

"So we are free of that woman at last?" her father asked of Christabel, as the guard locked the door of the carriage; "what an intolerable nuisance she has been. To be boxed up in a stage-coach with her is penance enough for a lifetime. You seemed friendly with her, Christabel, too friendly under the circumstances, I think."

"Papa, she did all the talking and I listened ; what else could I do?"

"Well, it is one reconciling point in our leaving Heatherington that we leave the neighbourhood of those people. I never wish to hear their names again. They have done their worst on me now, and I hope they are happy. By-the-by, Christabel, how long are those lame friends of yours going to stay at Heatherington?"

"Mr. Francis will soon be able to bear the drive to Abbot's Court now, papa. He has been in the schoolroom the last week."

"Yes! helping you to teach the twins, and correcting Katie's exercise, and coaching up Harold in his Latin. I have no great objection to him or his sister either, but a month is a fair allowance, and I want Alice back too; they seem determined to keep her at Abbot's Court, and it is a poor preparation for her Bristol life."

"I wonder Alice wishes to stay," Christabel said; "but Lena is very fond of her."

"Alice has a way of winning people to her service, no doubt. Now when we get to Bristol—which won't be yet however—we must have our wits about us. We will go to the hotel near the station first, and then I must leave you there, and find my way to the wharf—the key of the house in Adelaide Square is to be there, and you and I must go over it this evening. What a day!" Mr. Kingscote said, as he looked out of the window, blurred and blotted by the driving

rain. "I hope you have thick boots, Chrissie, for your first tramp through Bristol streets. They will look charming to-day!"

"It is as well to see our new home in its worst phase first, papa; brighter days will come, and we shall have the sun and the blue sky in Bristol as well as in Devonshire."

Then Mr. Kingscote relapsed into silence, and was soon sound asleep: while his daughter thought over many things, and tried to school herself to the notion that they might get on very well at Bristol after all.

The last month had passed in intimate association with Bertha Francis, and insensible but sure had been her influence. Step by step had Christabel advanced lately towards the reality of what had hitherto been to her but a shadow; and she had found in Bertha Francis what she had never found before—a friend whose hope and aim were not set on the things which are seen and temporal, but stretched forward to those which are unseen and eternal. Yet Bertha Francis never preached, or talked of her deeds of love and charity, or vaunted herself as some well-meaning active souls are apt to do. She trod on no narrow plank of bigotry, on which if others stood not with her, she could have no part or lot with them; she was a woman of considerable gifts and powers of mind, but as simple as a child in her faith, and as tender in her judgments of those who differed with her, as

she was strong in maintaining the faith which she had chosen. Bertha Francis was one of those people who, if we could multiply them by thousands, would change the character of the unreal, unsatisfactory atmosphere in which the Christian world is wrapped. Wherever she went she was felt to be true and genuine, and her love to her Master shone out in her life and conversation, and made itself known—just as the sun is known—not so much by actual vision, as by the warmth, and gladness, and brightness which it sheds around.

“Papa, we are very near Bristol now,” Christabel said, as she saw to her left hand St. Vincent’s rocks, and the great ugly erection of brick which stood out for so many years to show what a great design had been unfulfilled, of connecting the two banks of the river by a suspension bridge. “Papa,” Christabel repeated, “there is the Observatory. I remember that, when we were in Clifton, when I was a little girl. We shall be able to get up to the Downs sometimes, I hope.”

“Yes, but it is a long pull from Adelaide Square, you will find. Have there been any passengers since we passed Bridgewater. I have been asleep, I think.”

“No one has been in the carriage; we have had it all to ourselves. How smoky and dirty Bristol looks. But there is St. Mary Redcliffe church, papa, which makes one think of the ‘marvellous boy.’”

"A marvellous deceiver, when stripped of romance; still, poor fellow, it was a hard case: time and tide were against poor Chatterton, as against many of us."

No more was said till Mr. Kingscote and Christabel were in the dirty cab which took them to the Railway Hotel. There, in a dingy sitting-room, Christabel was left to her own meditations, while her father went to the office on the quay, promising to return in an hour, when dinner was ordered. It seemed the longest hour Christabel had ever spent—the rain falling heavily; nothing was to be seen from the window but the warehouses opposite; a few squalid children collected under an archway, playing marbles and making mud pies; omnibuses and flies, laden with luggage, passing to and from the station; foot passengers hurrying along under dripping umbrellas; and poor women, who had nothing to shelter them, dragging slipshod feet over the shining pavements, their ragged shawls hanging closely to their shoulders, and their cotton gowns clinging to their heels. A few blythe-hearted errand-boys went whistling on their way, with baskets of fish, or dejected-looking strawberries, with a tin measure lying on the top; but for the most part everything looked deplorable, and the summer rain, which is so welcome and pleasant in the country, was doleful and depressing in the town. Within, it was scarcely better, the smoky looking-glass over the chimneypiece, which was

guarded by folds of yellow muslin, reflected only the big red flowers sprawling over the walls, here and there diversified by a picture of stiff-legged horses, and a few dogs with pointed noses, under the care of men with red caps and jackets and very stout leggings ! In one of the recesses by the fire-place there was a table with some glasses and a jug half full of water, which looked a very uninviting colour; on the other were two or three books, to which Christabel turned hopefully, but was disappointed to find they were only bound volumes of almanacks and a very old peerage. There were sounds beneath, of people coming and going, and voices of waiters answering a summons, and the tinkling of bells, but nothing seemed to come near Christabel. The clock on the chimneypiece was not going, most likely had not been going for years. The dial, supported on the back of a stone greyhound, looked blank and vacant, and a large crack on the glass shade which protected it had been mended or strengthened by two red wafers. Christabel had no watch, and was getting very hungry, when a waiter at last appeared, and removing a smart yellow and black cloth, covered the table with one of old green baize, before he proceeded to unfold the actual dinner cloth, which he did with some ceremony, looking from time to time at Christabel, who, seated in a stiff-backed horse-hair chair, by the window, was conscious that she was the object of the waiter's observations.

"Wet day, miss," he ventured at last, as he folded a napkin into an imposing creation, and laid a bit of rather suspicious looking bread within it.

"Yes, it is indeed," Christabel answered, without turning her head towards the speaker.

"Will the gentleman be over time, Miss, do you think? He ordered soles and chops at four, and it now wants twenty-one minutes to five, by me," and the man consulted a silver watch with an air of profound meditation, and then replaced it in his waistcoat pocket. "We gave him half-an-hour, as we do in general, when parties come here on business; business often lengthens out, and there is no thought of how the enemy goes."

"The enemy!" Christabel repeated, half to herself and half aloud, "what can he mean."

"Soles is particular, miss," the waiter resumed, "and chops is none the better for being dried to a chip. So I hope the gentleman will not be long."

"Oh, no!" Christabel answered, this time with more self-possession. "My father will be here directly, I think."

"Very good, miss, then I may as well tell the cook to dish up. This is a slack day with us: so we ain't in no particular hurry; I only speak for the sake of the credit of the dinner."

It was a great relief at last when the waiter bustled away, and soon after her father came in.

She sprang towards him, feeling as if he had been gone away for a day instead of two hours.

"Oh, papa, I am so glad you are come."

"Poor child," said her father, kindly, "this was a horrid hole to leave you in; but you see, Christabel, we can't afford to go to swell hotels now. I dare say you are as hungry as I am. It seems a long time since we discussed our luncheon at Bridgewater. Come, we must make haste, for I have arranged to meet the agent at No. 3, Adelaide Square, at six o'clock. Ring the bell. We really must be quick."

Christabel was surprised to see her father in better spirits and more cheerful than he had been for a long time. The dinner was certainly not very tempting, though the waiter removed the covers with a magnificent air, and poured out the half-pint of sherry which Mr. Kingscote ordered, as if it had been the choicest Madeira.

As soon as dinner was over, Christabel and Mr. Kingscote set forth towards Adelaide Square, and found the house agent waiting for them there.

It was undoubtedly a good house; and yet, when the large hall door creaked on its rusty hinges, and closed behind them, Christabel felt the strangeness of their position come upon her with full force. The entrance-hall and staircase were wide, and on each side of the hall door was a good-sized sitting-room; one a dining-room

the other a breakfast-room, as Mr. Driver pleasantly termed it.

"What painting and papering is necessary Sir Richard authorizes me to do," Mr. Driver said, "and perhaps this young lady would like to see patterns of the papers to-morrow. The drawing-room is quite a spacious apartment. Indeed, these houses were inhabited by gentry in days gone by. Now, of course, things are changed. The gentry prefer Clifton; but Adelaide Square is very respectably inhabited, and the look-out is agreeable."

Christabel glaced at the stunted shrubs and trees which grew in the square, surrounded by iron railings, and across them to the opposite houses, and thought of her own dear home, and the glory of sea and land which encompassed it. At the back of the house the windows only commanded a view of walls and chimneys; and ground glass in many of the panes was a sufficient evidence that even Mr. Driver could not pronounce the look-out agreeable.

But Christabel roused herself from her somewhat gloomy thoughts, and began to consider that she must take a true and particular account of the house to her mother. The old Heatherington furniture would go a long way towards filling this house in Adelaide Square; and Christabel took a pencil from her pocket, and wrote down the sizes and capabilities of the various rooms, while her father discussed the

probable expense of the paper with Mr. Driver.

"I think it will be comfortable, papa," she said, as they returned to the hotel. "Mamma can have the bed-room over the drawing-room, and you must have the dressing-room next to it; then the twins can be in that large roomy attic, and Katie and Alice and me at the back, while Harold can fit into that little room by the drawing-room. I hope we shall have light pretty papers, and then it will look quite nice; and I must try to make some flowers grow in the windows. We will all do our best to be happy there, father."

Christabel passed her hand through her father's arm, and looked up into his face as she spoke with a bright smile. The rain pattered on the large umbrella, and the streets were wetter than ever; but Mr. Kingscote felt prouder and fonder of his daughter at that moment than he had done when he used to ride into Bideford with her by his side, in the far-off days of his early married life.

"And, papa, do you think you will like the work in Sir Richard's office?" Christabel continued; "what sort of place is it for you to sit in; is it high and airy?"

"It looks out on the river, Chrissie, and is well enough—my private room, as the head clerk called it; but I will not say it is as pleasant as the old library at Heatherington.

Good enough for me though, I dare say. Now we will go in and have tea, and then you must go to bed ; you will be tired out, my child. It is a comfort I have you left to me. Frank Beresford's conduct has not deprived me of you. By-the-by, Christabel, you will not let that lame hero at Heatherington carry you off, I hope."

"Papa !" and Christabel's merry laugh was sufficient proof that she was quite unconscious of any such intention on the part of the lame hero ; "papa ! he would never dream of such a thing ; or if he did it would be of no use. Papa ! what is the matter ?" for Mr. Kingscote had started aside as if he had been stung, when a tall man brushed past them as they were turning into the hotel. In the dim fading light of the July evening it would be impossible to recognize any one ; but as Mr. Kingscote turned quickly round the man involuntarily turned also, and the gas lamp shone full on his face. It was but a momentary glance ; but it was enough for Christabel to feel a vague and uncomfortable sense that somehow that face was familiar to her. Another moment, and her father exclaimed, "Yes ; I am sure of it. It is Frank Beresford !" "I thought he had left the country, papa ; I thought——"

"Yes ; and I thought so too ; and so do his creditors, I dare say ; but here he is, skulking about in Bristol, under a feigned name, no doubt. An unprincipled vagabond !"

Mr. Kingscote relapsed into his accustomed moody silence after this, and Christabel found it in vain to try and rouse him out of it,

When at last they separated for the night, Christabel ventured to say, "Do not let the sight of Mr. Beresford disturb you, father; he can do us no further harm, can he?"

"I can't speak of him, child," her father said, impatiently. "I won't speak of him," he added; "his very name is hateful to me."

"Oh, father!" Christabel exclaimed, earnestly, "you must forgive him."

"Forgive him!" he repeated, bitterly; "I could forgive a man for knocking me down, sooner than a doublefaced sneak, who was always deluding me with false promises, while all the time he intended to cheat me. Yes, from the very first, I believe he never meant to do anything else; and what makes it worse is, that he took advantage of my weak point in getting me to lend my name as his security. Forgive him, indeed! I should like to see both those Beresfords on the tread-mill."

Christabel said no more, but went slowly and sadly to the little close, stuffy room, where she was to pass the night. She was thoroughly tired and worn out; and going to the window, as was her habit, she drew up the blind. She always slept at home with the stars looking down at her over the boughs of the old elm tree; and when she saw lights behind a yellow blind, in a

window very near hers, and a stack of chimneys grim and ghost-like, rising from some out-house adjoining the hotel, the full force of town life, which she was henceforth to lead, came over her. She pulled the blind down again hastily and, kneeling down by her bed, burst into tears.

Sometimes, when we are much over-wrought, a very little thing is enough to upset the balance altogether, and so it was with Christabel now. The sun seemed to have gone behind a cloud, and the day was dark and dreary. And when these days come to us in our youth they oppress us more than in later years, when we have learned to look for the alternation of light and shadow, and to bow our heads beneath the storm while it passes over us. To-night Christabel felt that severing from early associations and childhood's days, which is so hard and so bitter, and then came the thought that the man, of whose face she had caught a distinct though transitory sight that evening, was interesting to her, not as the man who had defrauded her father and had been the means of bringing trouble upon them all; not as the man who was hiding from the face of the creditors whom he had wronged, but simply and only as St. Aubyn's father.

Where was he now? and how would it prosper with him? Would it, indeed, be that she should have at last to decide between her duty to her father and him, and answer that question,

to which she had given no reply on the bright May morning, the last on which she had ever seen him ?

"Gilbert!" Bertha had spoken two or three times, and her brother had not answered. "Gilbert, are you in a brown study, or are you counting the drops of rain as they fall from that branch of clematis?" And as her brother was still silent, Bertha left her seat and went across to him, as he lay upon the shabby horse-hair sofa, in the Heatherington schoolroom, and, leaning over him, said, "Is your leg painful to-night?"

"No," he answered; "only, Bertha, I don't think you have fully taken in what a blight this is to me. I can't be ordained now; no, nor at Michaelmas nor at Christmas either; and I shall be at the best a lame parson, for I feel a conviction this smashed leg of mine will never be as long as the other again. Really," and he began to laugh, "there is something absurd in the idea of our both hobbling about the world; it will be the lame leading the lame with a vengeance."

"We won't make up our minds to that yet, dear," said Bertha. "The authority of these country surgeons is not so very high that we must rest entirely upon it. Besides, the time is short yet, only a month since the accident, and you have made a great deal of progress since you came into this room a week ago."

"Have I?" he said. "By-the-by, Bertha, we must try to get away from here soon, in a day or two, I mean; and what is to be done in the shape of compensating the Kingscotes for the trouble we have given them? We must make some acknowledgment."

"I do not see that we can do that, Gilbert. Mrs. Kingscote and Christabel have done everything with such a hearty good-will, and I only feel as if we had made life-long friends."

Gilbert did not answer.

Then she said, "How Christabel is missed in the house! the children have been so unruly to day, and Harold was as idle over his Latin as he could be. I thought you were very patient with him, Gilbert."

"I like the boy," was the answer, "and I like that honest child Katie, too. It is amusing to see her treatment of those two little butterflies—Alice and Lena—when they alight here for a few minutes. It strikes me Miss Alice will take up her quarters at Abbot's Court altogether, and that she considers my broken leg a fortunate event. She is a spoiled child just as much as Lena; and, indeed, all these Kingscotes get their own way too much, except one, and she helps to spoil the rest. Mrs. Kingscote, charming as she is, has too little strength of purpose. But we are discussing our hosts, and getting away from our own concerns, Bertha. That was a cold letter from Mr. Benson this morning,

regretting my accident would oblige him to seek another curate. But what shall we do meantime?"

"Wait," Bertha said; "and, Gilbert, I think it is quite best that it should be so. You will be the better prepared for Holy Orders by this waiting time. It is God's hand, and we will try to be patient, and abide His time."

Instead of combating what she said, as she half expected, her brother answered, "I dare say you are right. I do not believe I was in the least fit to be launched into a populous parish like St. Lawrence's, in the heart of Bristol. I do not believe I shall ever be fit for it. I have been making a great many mistakes during my Cambridge life. I have seen them all written before me, since I have been laid up. What a delusion university training is when a man is to go into the church, as they call it. If a man is clever, it is all emulation and vehement desire to come out well in the schools; if he is lazy or a block-head, he idles away his time on the river or at other fellows' rooms; and then at last pays his bills, if he can, and rushes into Orders, just as I was doing; and the boy Harold was really as fit as I am. Still I feel it comes over me as a great blight, as I said just now, and sometimes I think I shall give up taking Orders altogether."

"No; oh, no! dear Gilbert," Bertha said, earnestly; "I cannot let my great hope fade away utterly. Only I see in this temporary obstacle

thrown in the way of its fulfilment, the Hand of wisdom, infinite wisdom, and so I am content to wait."

"Well," he answered, "let it be so; and now I think I must get one of those stout Devonshire maidens to help me to my room. The contemplation of this driving rain is not enlivening, and I shall be glad to go to sleep. I wonder how Mr. and Miss Kingscote are getting on in Bristol. What a day it has been for her! and I dare say her father has not been in the most serene temper in the world. Heigh-ho!" and with something between a yawn and a sigh, Gilbert Francis laid his head back on the cushion, and awaited Susan's arrival to help him and his crutches into his bedroom.

Bertha sat for a few minutes in the twilight after she had seen her brother safely to his room; and then answered Harold's invitation to come down to supper, by saying he must give her the help of his shoulder if she attempted to descend the stairs.

"All right, but do come," said Harold, "it is so awfully dull down there, and mamma is in the dumps, and Katie has got a headache and is gone to bed."

"So you want me to do what you ought to do," said Bertha, pleasantly; "cheer your mother and help her to end this long wet day more agreeably than it began."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Harold,

"everything has gone wrong, and I am sure I have had enough to provoke a saint to-day. The twins spoiling my little printing-press was horridly tiresome : of course, I lost my temper."

"I do not see that there was any 'of course' about it," said Bertha, "and I think, Harold, you should learn to rule your spirit, seeing that it is greater to do that than to take a city. The whole house was in an uproar about your printing-press, and then the innocent Latin books were sufferers, and poor Gilbert's head also."

The boy turned away impatiently, he hated a lecture ; and yet the sweet low voice touched him in an unexplained way.

"Come," she said, "Harold, forgive me for preaching, and help me down to supper ; but I have not lived a month in this house without seeing, that if you and Katie tried you might make your dear mother's path much easier, and soften a great deal that is now rough and troubled. There is only one of you who seems to forget herself and live for the rest, and when she is gone she is missed, and an insurrection breaks out. There is only one way to happiness, and we shall never find it till we know that way and forget self. You are the eldest son, Harold, and ought to be an example to the rest. I cannot bear to hear you raise your voice when you speak to your mother, and bluster and rave about the house when anything crosses your will."

Harold did not answer, but the gentle accents

touched him ; and when the lights in the dining-room revealed his face, it was subdued and thoughtful in its expression.

Mrs. Kingscote was sitting before the cloth spread half over the table, and there were traces of tears on her face. But it was not till Harold had eaten his poached egg and gone quietly to bed, that she turned to Bertha and said, "I have had a very disagreeable visitor this evening—Mr. Beresford from Northam. He evidently took advantage of my husband's absence, to come here to worry me with discussions. I think he wanted to get something out of me, indeed, I feel sure there was a *double entendre* in what he said, but I could not make out what the drift was. Mr. Beresford is the lawyer whose brother's want of honour is one cause of our present difficulties, and who managed to escape himself out of another scheme unharmed, into which he had beguiled my husband. I see that Mr. Beresford is annoyed at Philip's independence in going to Bristol, and making an effort to retrieve himself. He would rather that he had gone on borrowing money of him at a high interest, and he said something about terms whereby the difficulty about the security might be settled. An uncomfortable idea haunts me as to his meaning about that, but I may be wrong. I do not feel you are like a stranger now, my dear," Mrs. Kingscote went on, "or I should apologize for troubling you with all these concerns of ours."

"You have been so kind to me," Bertha rejoined, "that I feel as if the acquaintance of a few weeks had deepened into the friendship of years. So it is, that new and unsuspected blessings are brought to us by trial and disappointment. We both feel, both Gilbert and I, that knowing you and Christabel is the silver lining to the dark cloud of this accident, which has laid him aside so completely, and delayed the fulfilment of his own and of my brightest hopes. We have been talking about it this evening, and deciding that we must not trespass longer on your hospitality than we can help. The day after to-morrow we must make a move to Abbot's Court, and then I have a scheme of going to Wells, in Somersetshire."

"Wells! I scarcely ever hear that name without a strange pang of loving regret. I was there twenty-two years ago, with Philip; but, my dear, what would you and your brother do at Wells? It is so quiet and out of the way, and so far from the world."

"Yes," said Bertha, smiling, "and that is my reason for thinking of it just now. There is a Theological College established there, which has flourished beyond all expectations, and I do crave to get Gilbert under the good influence which is exercised there over men who leave the universities, and want a serious time for preparation for Holy Orders."

"I don't think I have ever heard of the Col-

lege," said Mrs. Kingscote. "There was none in my days, when I used to walk over the green fields and hills about the dear old city, and listen to the tinkling waters, and hear the cathedral bells strike out upon the summer air. Oh! it was the spring time of my life then. Philip and I were there for two months, soon after our engagement. That is to say, I was in the neighbourhood, visiting an aunt of his, who is long since dead. If you could have known him then, my Philip of other days, you would not wonder that the very name of Wells wakes up in my heart a whole host of tender memories." Mrs. Kingscote hid her face in her hands, and Bertha was greatly touched as she went on. "I feel as if I could not be the same woman now as then, when I seemed everything to him, and he was all the world to me. For years after our marriage it was the same; till these horrid money troubles came upon him, and then, instead of being his stay and help, he drifted away from me, and, as you must see, you cannot help seeing, this household suffers from the want of sympathy between him and me. If you go to Wells, Christabel must come from Bristol to see you. Does a railway reach it now?"

"No, but there is a point on the Great Western line where you can take a coach for Wells; in time the railway will extend to Glastonbury, and on at last to the 'City of the deep springs,' as it was called in old times. But, dear Mrs. Kingscote, this

is only a vision of mine, and may never be realized. Still, Gilbert and I have all the world to choose from, and God has given us means enough for our needs. So I thought a little temporary home in Wells would be so delightful, and then Gilbert might enter the College for a year, when he gets stronger. He is very much shaken by the accident ; it is not only the fracture itself. But I do not wish to look on too far ; he is everything to me, and for many years—ever since our mother died—I have felt him to be so peculiarly my own, and we are so happy together.” Bertha’s face kindled, as she spoke, with one of her brightest smiles, and Mrs. Kingscote wondered how it was that she could ever have thought her plain. Christabel was more discerning ; and from the first had discovered the attraction of Bertha’s face ; a beauty which depended not on regularity of features, or shining hair, but which was the beauty of a refined and chastened soul, shining through the homeliest outline, and telling of the Light whence it is alone reflected.

“I wonder how Christabel has got on to-day,” Mrs. Kingscote said, as Susan brought in the candles, and carried off the supper tray, and the lamp, as a hint that bed-time had arrived. “I long to hear to-morrow what she thinks of the house in Adelaide Square, and all about it. Christabel is so entirely to be trusted in taste and judgment,” her mother added, with one of her frequent sighs.

"Yes, I am sure she is," said Bertha, warmly, "the only fear about people like her is——" She stopped, she might be treading on dangerous ground.

"Is that she does too much for others," Mrs. Kingscote finished the sentence quickly. "I entirely agree with you, and I have many fears lest she should break down, dear, dear child!"

"I did not quite mean that," said Bertha, with a smile, as she settled herself on her crutch, to begin her journey upstairs. "I think Christabel is in the fullest health and strength, and that exertion and effort are a positive pleasure to her; she is just one of those women who would find a vocation for herself out of doors, if she had not such a decided one in her own home. What I meant was, that I think it is not good for Alice, for instance, to feel herself so free to do as she likes, because Christabel does everything at home; and little honest-hearted Katie is too apt to take it as a matter of course that her frocks will be mended every time she tears them; and Harold and those delightful Gemini seem to imagine that Christabel will make everything go smoothly for them too." Bertha might have gone on further, and said that as it was with the children, so it was with the father and mother; but she forebore, from a feeling of delicacy, and only left it to Mrs. Kingscote to supply what more might have followed. Besides, Bertha felt how much of refinement of mind and taste Chris-

tabel owed to her gentle mother ; how traces of her careful training might be seen in all her daughters, but in Christabel especially ; and she contrasted her constantly with many girls she had met, who had acquired missishness and a certain feminine priggishness at schools, even at the best ; —or a second rate, and low tone of thought from association with inferior-minded governesses —girls who go out to teach, needing themselves to be taught, and are often the first to sow tares amongst the wheat of home training ; which in after years none see more plainly than they do, when time and experience have showed them how unfit they were to guide a group of undisciplined girls, being but undisciplined girls themselves.

Mrs. Kingscote and Bertha parted at the top of the staircase, and Bertha turned a second time to Mrs. Kingscote for a good-night kiss.

“God bless you, my dear!” were the last words ; “I am so glad Christabel has a friend in you ; you will not forget her, I know.”

“Neither her nor any of you ; Gilbert and I must always look back with gratitude on these weeks at Heatherington ; but we can never thank you enough for your kindness—never.”

CHAPTER VI.

LAST DAYS AT HEATHERINGTON.

"The way is desert, difficult and long ;
Temptations thicken, and the foe is strong ;
All is tumultuous and perplexing here—
Draw up my heart where undimmed Truth shines clear."
C. M. N.

ALICE KINGSCOTE had been, as she expressed it herself, "perfectly happy" at Abbot's Court. If that pleasant life of luxury and ease could but have lasted ! There was always something being planned and carried out to make excitement and variety ; and Alice's pride was made to yield to her vanity, while she accepted Lena Adair's offer of several pretty dresses, which had been worn once or twice, and had then been discarded by their mistress for something newer and prettier. Alice could, even for the sake of appearance, school herself to bear the somewhat contemptuous remarks of Lena's maid as she received her orders to make a pink barege fit Miss Kingscote, and to alter the wreath of roses

to suit Miss Kingscote's head. In height the two girls were about equal ; but Alice's figure was much the slighter of the two, and Mrs. Prynne had, therefore, some trouble in taking in bodies, which had been originally made for her young mistress. On the very night when Christabel was going wearily over the house in Adelaide Square, Bristol, Alice was being dressed for an evening party, to which Lena had secured her an invitation.

"There, Prynne, that will do," Lena was saying, as Prynne gave the finishing touches to Alice's dress. "You will make me jealous if you turn her out in better style than you do me ! Indeed, I am jealous already."

Alice saw the scornful expression in Mrs. Prynne's face reflected in the glass, and winced a little as she said, "I have been thinking, Miss Adair, that you wore this dress last winter at Lady Dorchester's."

"Well, what if I did ? she is in London, and if she were not, we should not meet the identical people again to-night. How stupid you are, Prynne ! But, Alice, if you are afraid, let Prynne undress you and put on the white muslin ; that is always safe."

Alice's colour deepened. "I am not at all afraid, thank you, Lena, and I think it is very good-natured of you to take me with you to-night, and give me the dress—it is very pretty !"

"Oh, there is no denying it—I am sure !" said

Prynne ; "and the pink becomes your darkish complexion, Miss Kingscote. Miss Adair is too much of a lily to bear anything but tender colours."

"Nonsense!" said Lena ; " Alice's complexion is as good as mine—and better ; it is the tint of reddishness in my hair that makes pink so obnoxious to me ! "

" Well really, Miss Adair, if you call your 'air red, I've done ! "

" I hope you have, Prynne ; now, Alice, run down to Cousin Nan till the carriage comes, and if it does come before I am ready, keep papa in a good humour, for, Prynne, I must have my hair done again, it is a yard lower on one side than on the other, so I give you notice, and you must make haste. Take the white opera cloak, Alice, and will you have another bracelet ? "

" No, thanks," said Alice, feeling a shadow had come over her satisfaction with the dress, in spite of herself. " What a hateful woman that Prynne is ! " she said as she tripped downstairs ; " I do not know how it is Lena puts up with her." A glance at herself in a mirror as she went down the drawing-room restored her to good humour, and Cousin Nan's exclamation was very welcome.

" My dear, how pretty and nice you look ! I wish Lena had a sister, and I wish you could live here always ! "

" Thank you, very much," said Alice, " but to-morrow is my last day, I am afraid."

"Ah, so it is ! what a pity ! I forgot my brother and Lena were starting so soon for Switzerland. I shall stay here as long as Gilbert and Bertha wish to remain. You will come over and see them, perhaps, sometimes—poor things ?"

"Oh, yes ! as long as I am at Heatherington ; but I am afraid that will not be long. We are going to live in that horrid, hateful Bristol !"

"Bristol ! yes it is a dirty place ; but you will find Clifton very nice, for, of course, you will live up the hill in some of the handsome squares and terraces. I declare I have quite forgotten whether I did four long stitches in the last row of this crochet, and I can't see to count them by this light, it is such a dark, wet evening. My dear, will you count them for me ?"

Alice took the work and obeyed, while, at the same moment, Mr. Adair, in all the glory of the most fashionably cut evening suit, entered the room. His stiff grey hair stood more erect than ever, and his whiskers were trimmed with scrupulous care ; his shirt front was fastened with jewelled studs, and one splendid ring glittered on his little finger. He was all finished and complete, quite content that nothing was amiss, either in his toilette or his own person. Like many more, who have come suddenly, and in great measure, unexpectedly, into the possession of wealth, he was determined that the world should see he knew how to use it, and make the best of his position. Everything was a little overdone, it

is true, and the point of perfection strained somewhat, but the most critical observer could scarcely detect where the fault lay, if fault there were, and forgave Mr. Adair's pompous manner and air of conscious superiority, for the sake of his excellent dinners, and the undoubted fact that he had inherited the estate of Abbot's Court, and had not bought it with money made in trade, or even attained it by a marriage, in which riches compensated for want of birth and rank.

"Ah," he said, as he saw Alice, "is not Lena ready? The carriage will be round immediately. And where are the bouquets? I ordered Scott to cut two particularly fine ones for this evening."

All the time he was speaking, Mr. Adair was scanning Alice by the light of the two wax candles, Miss Griffiths had called in, to the help of her crochet, and an expression of the most undoubted admiration passed over his face. Alice, as she met his eye, blushed, she scarcely knew why; and when Mr. Adair presented one of the bouquets which the servant brought in when he announced the carriage, she was glad to bury her face in it to hide her confusion.

"It is difficult to say which is the fairer—the flowers or she to whom I humbly present them," Mr. Adair murmured, in a tone which was too low to catch Cousin Nan's ears. Something else followed in a still more subdued voice; and when Lena at last fluttered in, dressed in a gauzy

cloud of white tulle and lace, she was surprised not to receive the nearest approach to a reprimand, which her father ever bestowed, when she kept the carriage five minutes over the appointed time. She had even to touch his arm before he looked round, and then her question of "How do you like my dress, papa?" was much less rapturously answered than usual, "Very nice indeed; but do you not think you could have borne a little colour about you?" for Lena was entirely in white. "However, these flowers will relieve the effect a little. Look, pet; are they not beauties? Now we must hasten away."

"Papa; I thought you liked me in white better than anything," Lena said, in a voice in which a shade of disappointment might be detected; and when Prynn wrapped her cloak round her, as she passed through the hall, following her father with Alice on his arm, and she heard the maid say, in an undertone, "Mr. Adair seems to prefer pink to-night," something like a pang shot through Lena's heart; and for the first time in her life she felt that another had for the time engrossed her father's attention, and thrown her into the shade. The party was a large one, and Alice Kingscote was noticed by many of the families in the neighbourhood who were in the habit of leaving cards at Heather-ton, but who had ceased to think of the Kingscotes as people who were on the list of dinners or parties of any kind.

"A mere child ; I did not know she was out," one of the ladies remarked to her nearest neighbour. "The other sister has never appeared at all, so this younger one has stepped before her. We were speaking of little Miss Kingscote," she continued, as Lena came up. "She is a great friend of yours, I think. She is very pretty, but surely very young ; scarcely out of the schoolroom."

"Alice is more than seventeen," Lena said, her eyes following the pink dress as it whirled past in that most ungraceful of dances, which is now happily exploded—the polka.

"She has been at Abbot's Court some time, I think," the old lady, who was of an inquisitive turn of mind, continued ; "a very nice thing for her ; for I hear, poor people, they are in great trouble ; obliged to let Heatherington, and unable to meet their expenses. Do you know, my dear, how it is the Beresfords are mixed up with the story of the Kingscotes' misfortunes ? I can't make it out. Sit down, will you not ?" the good lady went on, making room for Lena on the sofa. "You look pale and tired. Have you been dancing much ?"

Lena's usual power of repartee seemed to fail her, and she only answered in monosyllables. A vague uncomfortable sense of some shadow coming across her bright young life seemed to exercise its spell over her. The tour in Switzerland and North Italy, to which she had been

looking forward with such pleasure, seemed to have lost its charm ; and Prynne's words, and still more expressive looks, haunted her. Could it be possible that her father, at nearly half a century of age, could be thinking of Alice Kingscote in any other light than her friend ? and could it be possible that Alice was inclined to encourage such an idea ? " I will not believe it," she said to herself, " it is nonsense ;" and breaking away in the middle of a long history of old Mrs. Foster's, Lena went across the room to join the Carews, who were discussing the probabilities of a fine day for the grand archery meeting during the next week.

A few days after this, Mr. Adair and his daughter and Prynne had started for their tour ; and Gilbert Francis and his sister were established at Abbot's Court, with Cousin Nan, who was to do the duty of hostess, till Gilbert was sufficiently recovered to move away from the neighbourhood altogether.

Alice had returned to Heatherington, and was more than usually silent and *distracte*, her sister thought. There was at all times too little sympathy between them, and Christabel was determined to do her best to alter this. She made Alice's little room bright with flowers, and took pains to paint the house in Adelaide Square in as fair colours as possible. It was disappointing to meet with so little response to all her efforts ; and when Christabel displayed the

patterns of papers which she had brought from Bristol, Alice withheld either commendation or disapproval. "It did not much matter," she said, "what the papers were like in a horrid city house like the one they were going to."

The two girls were in the drawing-room with their mother; and the table was covered with the papers, which Christabel was unrolling one by one, and holding up for approval.

"I think this grey watered paper will be very pretty for the drawing-room, with a pink border round the ceiling and doors. It will be like Lena Adair's sitting-room at Abbot's Court."

"Alice ought to know then if it would look well," said Mrs. Kingscote; "what do you think of it, dear?"

"It is not in the least like Lena's paper, mamma; that has a gold border, and the shade is a great deal lighter."

Again Alice seemed to be engrossed in the book she was reading, and her mother said gently, "It would be better, Alice, if you roused yourself to take some interest in what lies before us, and followed your sister's example."

"But Christabel's opinion is always more thought of than mine," Alice said, taking refuge, as she almost invariably did, from unpleasant discussion, by leaving the room.

"I wish I had not let her stay so long at Abbot's Court," her mother said, sadly, "it has quite unsettled her."

"Well, never mind now, dear mother, the Adairs are gone for three months, and we shall see very little more of them, I dare say. Lena will find a new friend in Mrs. Henderson, who is coming here, and Alice will be forgotten. Now we must make a list of the papers, and send it to Mr. Driver by to-day's post. Mamma, I have made an inventory of all the linen, this morning, and have begun a list of the things which I think we might take with us, and what we can leave."

"Thank you, dear: how useful you are! but, Christabel, you must not do too much, or over-tax your strength."

"There is no fear of that, mother. Now, I will take the twins and Katie a walk, and Harold too, if I can find him. Perhaps while I go and get ready, you will copy out the numbers of the papers for Mr. Driver, and we will go over the hills to Northam, and post the letter."

When Christabel was gone, her mother applied herself rather wearily to the task before her, and while she was so occupied her husband came in.

"Where is Christabel?" he asked.

"She is gone to get ready for a walk, and is going to take these letters to the post. We have decided on the papers, Philip: the grey one for the drawing-room; do you like it?"

"Oh, it is all very well," he answered carelessly. "I hope you don't forget that we must be settled in that house in another six weeks. The Hendersons are very anxious to get possession

now. You seem to be taking it very easily, Emily."

"Oh Philip! Christabel and I do nothing now but prepare for the change; and she has to-day made out a list of the things we must leave behind us here. The two maidservants wish to go with us to Bristol, and you will say a kind word for old Joseph to the Hendersons."

"Poor old fellow! he won't be much acquisition or cut a grand figure amongst the Hendersons' gardeners."

"Shall we ever come back to our dear old home, I wonder," Mrs. Kingscote said, half to herself and half to her husband.

"I don't wish to come back," he said, "unless I can take up my proper position in the neighbourhood. The Hendersons' lease will be made out for seven years, renewable for seven more."

"Harold will be a man by that time, and perhaps may have done something to distinguish himself," his mother said, fondly; "he may live here, if we never do, Philip."

"Harold distinguish himself!" Mr. Kingscote repeated. "He must go into an office, and leave school by the time he is sixteen. College days and university honours are over for us. Instead of dreaming over what is unlikely, I do wish, Emily, you would settle your mind to what is inevitable. It is no use disguising the fact, we are ruined; and though, of course, you will say it is my fault, still, think what I am giving up

in burying myself at my time of life in Sir Richard Talwyn's office on the quay at Bristol. It can't be said of me that I am making no effort for my children."

He left the room, and Mrs. Kingscote buried her face in her hands. She shed no tears, her heart was too sore just then. It was always so now; any discussion with her husband ended thus, leaving behind it a hard, bitter feeling of vanished love and faded hopes. In their early married days there had been sorrows and troubles, but it had been so different. She was then his best comforter; she was then ever able to soothe and cheer him, and in her turn went to him for loving tenderness when she was oppressed and sad. And yet, looking back over the past, she could not tell herself she was without blame. She had been too careless and easy about expense; and too much disposed to take things as they came, and allow herself to drift down the stream, with a vague idea that in the end the clouds would clear, and the sky brighten. She could not, she thought, help the money difficulties into which her husband had fallen, and it was better not to interfere, but to go on her own way as well as she was able.

But this necessity for leaving Heatherington was a great blow; to exchange quiet, and greenness, and freshness, with the music of the sea, and the whispering of leaves, and the singing of birds, for the noise and smoke of a bustling



city, was in itself a trial to Mrs. Kingscote. She had all Christabel's keen delight in natural beauty, and all Alice's love of what was pretty and appropriate about her daily life, so that this separation from, and giving up of both, was no common sorrow to Mrs. Kingscote. Nevertheless, a word of regret from her husband, that she should thus have to relinquish the home which was dear to her, would have so wonderfully lightened the load. If he had sympathized in her feelings, half the pain would have been gone, she thought: but it was, as she said to Bertha Francis, her Philip of other days was scarcely to be recognized in the self-reproachful man, who seemed to live a life apart from her, and who, having lashed himself into making a great effort to be free from the pressure of his troubles by his own exertions, revenged himself, so to speak, by being more and more hard in his judgment of those who had wronged him, and more intolerant of the failings and weaknesses of those who were dearest to him on earth. So it is with all care and trouble, all disappointment and trial, which men and women try to meet single-handed, and, if I may use the word, ungraciously. Ah! it is a weary life, and a toilsome, which having lost the sweetness of the nether springs, cannot reach forward to the upper Fountain for healing and strengthening and refreshing. How many are there, scarcely past the prime of their days, who, like Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote, bend under a bur-

den too heavy for them, and will not turn for help to the great Helper ! How many stand by the buried hopes of years, and are angry that they are laid so low, and know nothing of that Hope "which maketh not ashamed," that Anchor sure and steadfast, which will never, never fail the hand stretched out to grasp it.

Christabel's walk to Northam was, after all, a solitary one. Harold and Katie preferred going to Abbot's Court to inquire for Gilbert and Bertha Francis, and the twins, being free from lessons, were engaged in a marvellous erection in some of the back premises, which was designed for the accommodation of Puff's puppies, a large family which had appeared that morning in the stables, and were destined by Joseph for the duck pond in the evening, although he discreetly kept that intention to himself. When Christabel saw Gemini's dirty holland suits, and their evident enjoyment of their occupation, she had not the heart to order them to be made neat and take a demure walk with her to Northam, remembering how very soon demure walks would be the only exercise available for them ; but as she passed the two children she said, "Have you seen Alice, Johnny and Harry?"

"No," shouted one of the twins ; "not since she went up to the cliff-house hours ago ; and then she scolded me for catching hold of her dress."

"And I don't wonder," was Christabel's

answer ; " I also prefer not being touched by those dirty paws of yours."

" You see," said Harry, " we are very hard at work. Puff can't live in the kennel with all those children ; and so we are building her a house."

" All right," was their sister's answer, " only be good boys, and don't tear your suits with those sharp sticks ; and if I am not back by the time the first bell rings, promise to go in and let Susan get you ready for dinner." Then, with her roll under her arm and her letter in her hand, Christabel was gone.

Over the familiar path, along the hill-side, which she had trod so many times, and which she was so soon to tread no more ! Unconsciously her thoughts went back to the early summer morning when the foxgloves were nodding around her, and the freshness of the newborn life of the spring yet lingered on the face of the earth. Now the foxgloves were withered and gone, and the glory of the lady's-fingers dimmed. The scorching rays of the unusually hot midsummer had browned the turf, for the rain of two days which had fallen so thick and fast had been followed by the same cloudless skies and burning sun which had reigned supreme for many weeks. Only the sea looked blue and glittering now as then, and the sands as golden and smooth, while the ships sailed past as proudly out to the great Atlantic as on that May morn-

ing. To Christabel it seemed that she too had something more of the heat and burden of the day upon her, since she had carried the thick ominous-looking letter to Mr. Beresford's house ; something less of the light-heartedness of youth, and more of the foreboding of riper years. No snatches of song came from between her lips now ; but her sweet face was serious, almost sad, as she went along. Changes had come, and what more might not follow ? and how should she meet them ? That young, resolute, impetuous life which was bound up with hers, how was it speeding in the distant country ? would change and time touch it ? would it be as he had said, that his San Christabel would be the first to welcome him when he returned after long years ? or would it be that if her welcome were ready, as ready she knew it would ever be, he, growing out of early manhood into maturer years, would cease to care for it, and prize it no more ? Such things she told herself were frequent in the story of life ; and yet, and here a smile dawned on her face, she could not think St. Aubyn would change. In the light of those last few words which he had spoken, she had since read the meaning of many things which had gone before. All his acts of chivalrous and boyish devotion to her service in many expeditions by sea and land ; all the confidence he had rested in her when his life with his uncle and aunthad galled his proud spirit ; all his interest in books, and passionate love of

music, which he had brought to her, and found, as she knew he had, ready sympathy—a sympathy of taste and feeling which she could not help, and which had prepared the way so insensibly for the response which her heart, though not her lips, had made to his love. It was an unwelcome interruption to such musings to hear, as she turned away from the Northam post-office, Mr. Beresford's voice addressing her. He dilated on the pleasure it gave him to meet her—his hope that she would allow him to accompany her on her return towards Heatherington, "For we are old friends, Miss Kingscote, and I do wish to have a little conversation with you on a matter of deep interest. I called on your good mother the other evening when you were absent in Bristol, and tried to touch the subject delicately which I am now going to open more fully to you."

"Mr. Beresford," Christabel interrupted, almost as proudly and stiffly as her father could have done, "I am so entirely ignorant on all matters of business that it is useless referring to me ; and I imagine anything you have to say relates to—to—money, and my father's losses."

"In some measure I allow it is so ; but there is something of far deeper moment behind—something which will affect my whole life," he continued, "on which, I may say, all my happiness depends. I would have written what I am about to say, but feared that I could not explain myself to you as I would wish. I had intended

presenting myself at Heatherington this evening, when I should have craved for an interview ; but arrangements with my gardener have happily detained me from my office for an hour, and thus I am so fortunate as to meet you."

Christabel walked very fast, and straight onward, turning her head neither to the right nor to the left. Mr. Beresford could only catch the outline of her profile seen under the shade of her wide-brimmed brown hat. What he did see was not encouraging, and he began to falter a little.

"I am going home this way," she said, presently, "by the upper road, and not over the hills, as I have a visit to pay to an old friend. Do not let me take you any further, Mr. Beresford ; and please excuse me if I say I would rather not pursue this conversation."

"But I must pursue it," Mr. Beresford said, breathlessly, for Christabel's pace was every moment becoming too quick for him. "You know," he said, plunging headlong into the subject at last, and forgetting in his excitement and haste the oily deliberate tones in which he generally spoke ; "you know my unfortunate brother has caused a great deal of your father's perplexities ; but now the coast is clear, both of him and all his belongings. I am thankful to tell you, he and his wife and three children have been shipped off to Australia within the last day or two. He returned from his first escape, and

applied to me for help, lurking about Bristol in the most degraded way. My help was afforded to pay his passage and that of his family across the world, on the condition that he never returns. If he breaks that condition, I shall not move a finger to prevent his being clapped into prison. I renounce him and his children. I have only been too forbearing. That eldest boy was a thorn in my side for years, and a grand return he made me for my kindness. I had far better have sent him to a charity school, and given him up at once and for ever. I had an insolent letter from him yesterday, demanding as a right, a paltry sum which he fancies he inherits when he comes of age from his mother ; but part of which is certainly due to me for board, lodging, and education for more than eight years."

"Due to *you*," Christabel exclaimed, turning full upon the dark-browed man her clear lustrous eyes, which were sparkling with indignation ; "Due to you !"

The lawyer resumed his professional manner, and replied, "Yes, Miss Kingscote, due to me. He is very much mistaken if he thinks I am going to send that money out to the Brazils to be made ducks and drakes of in some absurd cotton or coffee plantation. But pardon me if natural irritation has made me forget what I owe to your presence. It is of another matter I would speak ; it is of that unfortunate sum which the Exeter bank

demands of your father, the payment of which must, I greatly fear, hamper him, even though he makes such praiseworthy efforts to work in an office,—surely you would wish to save him that indignity, and there *is* a way to do so.”

For a moment Christabel looked up inquiringly into Mr. Beresford’s face ; but there was something in those dishonest eyes which made her turn away from them almost with a perceptible shiver.

“ There *is* a way,” he repeated. “ I will pay the money into Henderson’s bank. I will arrange matters with the coming tenant at Heatherington, and the lease need never be signed. I will smooth down all difficulties. I will see that your mother is re-established in a home so dear to her, if only you, Christabel, will exchange that home for Marina, and come there as my wife. I have watched your dawning beauty,” he went on, in a would-be impassioned strain, “ I have for years thought you would be the crown of all my prosperity, for I am a rich man now ; and only last week I took, as the phrase goes, a good haul from some fortunate investment. You shall have everything worthy of you. You shall——”

They had reached the first of a row of small red brick cottages now, and here Christabel stopped. With a well-bred dignity and grace which was inherent in her, she turned full upon Mr. Beresford, flashing with a sense of the little-

ness of his soul, and the grave offence of which he was guilty in speaking thus to her; but her voice was gentle though firm as she said, "Mr. Beresford, will you excuse me now? I am going into this house to see a sick friend of mine. I need hardly say that I could not for a moment think of accepting the proposal you have made me. I am only sorry and surprised that you should have obliged me to tell you how distasteful that proposal is. I trust you will spare me the pain of saying more, and allow me to take leave of you."

But his hand was on the latch of the little gate leading to the garden before old Ellen Williams' cottage, and he did not remove it.

"You will think differently of this when you consider it at your leisure," he said. "Your devotion to your father will weigh in my favour, and a life-long affection on my part——"

"I will not hear any more," Christabel said; "be so kind as to let me pass through the gate."

"No," he said, and his eyes glistened under the overshadowing brows, while his likeness to a hawk soaring over its prey was more apparent than ever. "No," he continued in a disagreeable and familiar way. "No! I choose to speak, Christabel. You may think it very grand to beat about the bush, and seem to be insensible to the advantages of wealth and affluence over poverty—by-the-by, proud poverty, which is the worst of all. But I know women a little too

well to be put out of countenance by a girl's first negative. Come," he said, "let us be friends."

Poor Christabel was getting distressed and tremulous, though she tried hard not to show it. She only repeated, "Will you let me through the gate, please?"

He laid his hand on hers, which she put out towards the latch, and said in a low voice, "Are we to be friends? or do you mean that you repulse me altogether?"

She shuddered at his touch, and replied, "I do mean it. I utterly refuse to listen to any proposal you make, and I am sure my father would be entirely of my mind. Indeed," she said, "I think it is so ungentlemanly of you to press the point in this way—so unmanly."

He released the little trembling hand, and said, "Very well! you choose poverty and city life, and uncongenial society, instead of affluence and comfort, and an excellent position. Very well! remember that if we are not friends we may be something very different, and your father may have cause to regret your decision." He was pale with wounded pride and anger as he spoke. Turning away with a low bow, he murmured, "Good morning, Miss Kingscote," and as Christabel ran up to Ellen Williams' door, between the rows of cabbages and gooseberry bushes, Mr. Beresford watched her, and said, between his clenched teeth, "You may repent this yet, young lady! 'Ungentlemanly and unmanly.'

Very good! I will take my revenge for this some day, on some one that she does condescend to love. If Rachel should be right, and that wretched boy picking cotton in the tropics has anything to do with this, *he* shall repent it. And yet," he went on to himself, as he retraced his steps down the dusty road, and ground his heels on the loose pebbles which lay in his path; "and yet there is amazing dignity about her; if she was on the stage, she would be encored. After all, I have saved my money, and it might have been a bad investment. She has a spirit of her own, that is very clear. Nevertheless, the scorn with which she said those two words, is not pleasant. 'Ungentlemanly,' forsooth, 'unmanly!' Ah ha! Miss Christabel, I will not forget this." Nor did he.

"Why, my dear young lady!" was Ellen Williams' greeting, as Christabel sat down breathless, and quite unable to speak, in a chair near the old woman's bed. "Why, my deary, what ails you? I caught sight of you standing at the gate ever so long, and wasn't it lawyer Beresford with ye? I could not make him out quite, but Jeanny she comed in from the back place, where she is a doing a bit of washing, and said it was lawyer Beresford sure enough. He is a hard one on the poor, he be; and plucks many a poor dove to feather his own nest, that he do. But what has he been saying to you? he'd better have held his tongue, he had."

Christabel was herself again before old Ellen had finished, and dismissed the subject by saying, "Mr. Beresford was papa's lawyer, Ellen, and he was speaking to me on business. How is your leg to-day?"

"Very bad, my deary, very bad, and the doctor don't pay me much heed, not he; still I know I'm in God's hands, neither doctor's nor nobody's can be like His; and then pain brings Him very near, even to an old woman like me. And how's the squire and his lady? it seems but yesterday she came so pretty and nice, as a bride, to Heatherington; and now you are all going away. It is a bad day's work for many about here, for the squire had allays a free hand, too free, they do say, or he would not have come to this."

"Shall I read to you, Ellen?" asked Christabel, anxious to cut short the old woman's regrets and reminiscences, which she could scarcely bear just now.

"Yes, yes, my dear, read; your voice is always like music. I like the Bible best," as Christabel put out her hand to a book of large printed hymns, "and there is something in His words so different to anybody's else. Read me some of His words in St. John's gospel. I want to hear again about the company being fed on the grass, and I'll tell you what the lame lady said to me about it, last week. The lame lady that comed with you to see me, and then comed again by herself."

"Where shall I find it?" Christabel asked, for her acquaintance with the Bible had not hitherto been intimate, as we have seen. "Where shall I find it, Ellen?"

"I put a bit of lavender in the place in the Prayer-book," said the old woman, pointing at a book in a brown cover, which lay on the table; "See, there it is."

Christabel found it—it was the gospel for the fourth Sunday in Lent; and she read in slow distinct tones the story of the loaves and fishes. That wonderful story which rivets our attention in childhood, and to which we listen at our mother's knee, and see unrolled before us the picture in all its beauty. The much grass, and the weary multitudes—the five thousand hungry souls—fed by the loving hand, which, by His touch could make the little loaves and the two small fishes enough, and more than enough, for the needs of the earnest expectant crowd. Will not one be left unfed? not one sent empty away? No, in His great mercy, not one! As Christabel read, the whole scene rose up before her mind, and she seemed to realize it, and to be carried away in spirit to those hills and plains of Syria, where it all happened so long ago!

When she ended, old Ellen said, "Turn back, my dear, and read how the Lord asked Philip where the bread was to come from, that they should have enough to eat. Read what comes next, my dear."

And Christabel read the few words in parenthesis, wondering why the old woman should wish to dwell on them. "And this He said to prove him, for He Himself knew what He would do."

"That's it," said Ellen, "those are the words Miss Francis told me about ; she just said it showed how St. John knew the mind of the Lord, by putting in that little bit, and how often He does and says things to prove us *now*—while all the time He knows what He will do. Why, she said, often we can't see where we are going, or how we are to go, nor nothing at all about it ; and what is ordered seems kind of hard, and we don't understand it. But all the time *He knows*, and He is only proving us. Now, is not that a beautiful thought? It seems to make many puzzles plain."

Christabel did not answer—she was playing with the sprig of lavender, which presently she carefully replaced in the Prayer-book, and soon afterwards bid her old friend good-bye. But this was another seed sown by Bertha's hand ; and as Christabel walked quickly homewards, the disagreeable rencontre which had preceded her visit to old Ellen seemed to vanish away, and the homely words came back to her, "Truly, it did seem to make all puzzles plain."

Let us all try to hold fast the lesson which Christabel had set before her that day by a very humble teacher. However ignorant we are, He knows what He will do. Sometimes when we

are struggling in a black mist of distrust and faithlessness, when the times seem dark and evil, and neither sun nor stars appear to brighten the lonely way, let us try to feel that He is proving us, and trying us, and that He Himself *knows* what He will do.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME IN A CITY.

"A man who can give up dreaming, and go to his daily realities ; who can smother down in his heart its love or woe, and take to the hard work of his hands—that man is life's best hero."—ANON.

WE stand on the eve of a great change in our lives, and all our thoughts are engrossed more with the details of the present and less with the future, which is to be so different to our past, and wherein we are to look for, it may be, many new experiences and new ties. A dreamy scene of unreality possesses us, as we come to the moment when the great plunge is to be made ; we find that the very strangeness and novelty of our position dulls the keenness of sensation, and we drift into another current, with less of the sense either of gain or loss which we had pictured to ourselves when the event, now so close, was distant and visionary. Such is the actual experience of many a youthful bride as she comes to that last day in her early home, the

last day of her girlish freedom, the point towards which her thoughts have tended as the great moment of her life. Around her is the buzz of preparation, and the excitement of coming guests and presents, and the real or fancied drawbacks in the arrangements which are being made, or disappointments as to dress, or some other trivial thing, which is not of a feather's weight in the balance, perhaps, but presses heavily, coming when it does. And this too may be said of sadder and more solemn times; the outward and the visible lays its hand upon us, and by it we are taken off from the realization of ourselves as we are, stricken, bereaved, heart-sick, about to bury our dead out of sight, or about to part, for a lifetime, it may be, from one who has been dearer to us than our own life, over whose cradle we have watched in infancy, and whose glad ringing voice has made our home-music for many happy years. Yes, even on the threshold of the one eternal change, is it not so also? The dread, and the fear, and the natural clinging to life, with which that time has been looked forward to, seem so often mysteriously taken away. The soul stands ready to take flight with a calm unshaken confidence, which has none of the terror and the doubt it had once dreaded; or the sleep of God's beloved comes so softly down to the dying pillow, that it is as the literal and tangible earnest of the rest which remaineth.

So when the last day had come for the King-

scotes at Heatherington, the dreamy sense of unreality, of which I have spoken, seemed to brood like a spell over Christabel. It was on her, as she went late on the last evening to the cliff-house, and looked out over the sea, and saw the revolving light upon Lundy Island, for the last time. It was on her as she knelt by the wide window-seat, and saw the stars through the thick branches of the elm trees, and heard the whisper of the night breeze in the leaves. Then came the waking in the early morning, which had dawned grey and dull with the first faint presage of the coming autumn in its breath; the actual going out from under the old porch with her gentle mother, who spoke no word, and shed no tear, as she turned on the very threshold to put her arm into her husband's, and raise her face to his for a kiss. The men were packing one of the vans, and the débris of straw and matting strewed the drive as the rickety old fly from Bideford crept slowly down it towards the gate. The children and Alice had been sent, under Susan's care, to Appledore two days before, to remain there in lodgings till the house in Adelaide Square should be ready for them. Mr. Kingscote and the other old servant were to follow Mrs. Kingscote and Christabel later in the day, while a buxom granddaughter of old Jacob's, pleased and elated at her promotion, was to accompany the family as a little servant in the new household. And if the departure

from the old home was sad and strange, so in another way was the arrival at the new one. One load of furniture had reached its destination before them, and Christabel felt bewildered when she looked at the hall, full of a heterogeneous heap of carpets and kitchen utensils, which blocked up the way to the foot of the stairs, and heard the loud screaming remonstrances and orders of the woman Mr. Driver had provided to sleep in the house till the family arrived, and assist in the process of unpacking and unloading.

"I wish you had not come, mother," were Christabel's first words; "sit down a moment while I go and speak to the people upstairs."

Mrs. Kingscote sat down upon a large chest, and said, with a sad smile, "My dear, I wish I were more active and able to help; what a fearful confusion!"

But Christabel was roused to the necessity of action, and by her sweet, cheery, yet decided manner, won the unpromising charwoman to her allegiance, while the two workmen doffed their paper caps, and assured her with a grin that it was astonishing how things righted themselves if people took it easy.

"Now, Mattie," said Christabel to her little maid, "you must try and help me as much as you can, till the other servants come. Take off your bonnet and put down the basket and umbrella, and let us try to get one room into

a little order, so that Mrs. Kingscote may have some refreshment."

With a great effort this was accomplished in some degree, and with the charwoman's help some sort of dinner was provided in a corner of the drawing-room, and Christabel ran down to find her mother and bring her up to it. Mrs. Kingscote had vanished from her seat in the hall, and Christabel found her in the dining-room, standing near the window, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, mother, darling," she said, putting her arms round her, "you must come up and see the drawing-room; the paper is so pretty, and we have got a table there and two chairs, and some wine and sandwiches. Do come, mamma."

Poor Mrs. Kingscote was in the last stage of weariness, both of body and mind. This was quite a new experience in her life, and she had exerted herself beyond her strength for some days past, in preparation for removal, forgetting or not knowing that the worst part was yet to come, and that the settling in a new house is far more fatiguing and trying than preparing to leave an old one.

"Do come, darling mother," Christabel urged; "this room is the worst of all, and upstairs everything is so much fresher and brighter."

"Yes, I will come, dear; it was the sight of those old things in the corner which upset me. It is very foolish, but they look so strangely out

of place here, and seem to bring back the past so vividly."

"What things?" Christabel asked; and then turning, saw at a glance what her mother meant.

There was the old nursery rocking-chair, and several remnants of furniture of the same kind lying in a heap, amidst wisps of straw and wrappers.

"And I found this too," Mrs. Kingscote went on, struggling hard for composure, "and it all came back to me, the day your father first brought it home to Heatherington, a beautiful summer afternoon, long ago." As she said this, Mrs. Kingscote was disentangling with a gentle touch the leather cushion of a little child's swing from two or three cords which still hung to it. "Your father brought this home for you one afternoon in the carriage, when he had been to shop in Bideford. You were just a year and a half old; and I remember so well how we put the swing up in the old tulip tree, and how I held you in it; and you laughed and crowed; and it was hard to say which was the happiest, you or your father or me. I can fancy I now see the glitter the sunshine made through the leaves on your white frock, and how it glistened on your crisp golden curls; and then, when we lifted you out of the swing, afraid that you should have too much of it the first time, your father turned suddenly and kissed us, both you and me, Christabel, and said, 'She is a dear

little woman, this baby Christabel of ours ; I hope she will grow up like her mother ; it is the best wish I can wish her.' Oh, happy days ! happy days !" Mrs. Kingscote exclaimed, almost passionately, as she wound the cords round the seat of the swing, and let Christabel lead her upstairs ; adding to herself, though not to her daughter, " Yes, happy days ; not because we were young, and rich, and glad ; but because Philip's love was so tender and so true, and I was all the world to him."

By slow degrees something like order came out of chaos ; and at the end of a week the house in Adelaide Square was ready for the children and Alice. And now perhaps the hardest part of the trial began for Christabel. She was not perfect, or free from the faults common to characters like hers, and there was something which provoked her inexpressibly in the calm serene way in which Alice, on the afternoon of her arrival, walked through the house, and found fault and criticised, and suggested how much better this or that might have been, and what a mistake it was to think the drawing-room paper was like that in Lena Adair's boudoir at Abbot's Court.

" It is a pity you were not here," Christabel said, sharply, " before everything was done past recall. However, here is the house, and here we must live, and for mamma's sake we must make the best of it."

"It is very hard to find out what is the best," was Alice's rejoinder; "what with chimney-pots and walls, and those smoke-dried trees, the prospect without is not more alluring than the prospect within. And who are we to know here? Will nobody call on us? We shall be buried alive in a town far more than in the country. Has nobody called?"

"The surgeon's wife at No. 6, and the clergyman of the parish and his wife, and Mrs. Driver, the wife of the land agent and house surveyor who transacts Sir Richard Talwyn's business."

"Pray stop, Christabel," said Alice, "throwing her hat down upon the bed. "We do not want associations beneath us; we had better have none."

"My dear Alice," said Christabel, "Mrs. Driver would not be much flattered by the estimation in which you hold her. She lives in Clifton, and you live in Bristol, which decides the point of superiority at once."

Alice smoothed her roll of glossy hair as she stood before the glass, and Christabel caught the reflection of her face, where discontent and disappointment were struggling and clouding her fresh young beauty, and she was sorry for her.

"Alice, dear," she said, her voice changing into softness and gentle pleading once more, "do let us try, you and I especially, to bear everything bravely, and to hope for better days. Let us think how much worse it is for mamma; and

how hard it must be for our father to go to a office every day like a clerk, and to miss all his accustomed pursuits and country enjoyments. Do let us try to forget ourselves, and do our best to lighten the burdens which are so much heavier than our own."

Christabel was folding Alice's shawl, and putting it away as she spoke; and then she went up to her and kissed her cheek, which was turned away. It was disappointing to be met only with an indifferent answer.

"Oh, it may not last long, and I certainly am not going to settle myself into the idea of spending my life in Adelaide Square. I will leave you to do that. Perhaps I shall have a country-house of my own, and invite you to come and see me! Ah, Christabel; what will you say to that?"

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"Katie, Katie!" remonstrated Christabel;

while Mr. Kingscote said, sternly, "Boys, you must not make this noise in a town house, where everything sounds," and then he gave all his children but Alice a somewhat chilling welcome to their new home. But Alice received a second kiss, and even a pat on the cheek, as he said, "We are glád to see you, Alice, we want something to brighten us up, and be ornamental here; do we not, Christabel?" Alice's dress was one which had originated at Abbot's Court, and was well made, and trimmed by Mrs. Prynne's skilful hand. She had also sundry bits of adornment about her, which, without striking him in detail, caught her father's attention as a whole, and he did not dislike the effect, indeed, he was proud of Alice's undoubted beauty. "And here is a letter for you, Miss Alice," he said, cheerfully, as they all seated themselves at the table in the dining-room, "a foreign letter, with the Geneva post-mark on it."

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The little boys were gazing round the dining-room with delighted eyes ; it was new to them, and all novelty is pleasant to children. Harold began to talk of his walk to the grammar school, and said that after tea he should go and time it, while Katie said she would go with him.

"The days are getting short now," Mrs. Kingscote reminded them, and that they must not be out late in Bristol, and, indeed, must learn that they could not walk there alone, as they had done in the country.

"But, mamma !" said Harold, "the girls will always have me to take care of them, you know, and I shall soon find my way and understand the turns and twists."

"Don't turn and twist into the river, that's all," said Mr. Kingscote, as Harold left the room, and Katie scampered upstairs to get her hat ; while the twins, pacified by Christabel's promise of taking them to Clifton Downs if it was fine the next day, soon disappeared to investigate the upper regions of their new home, and to see what were the capabilities of an attic, which Christabel had promised they should have as a play-room, and where many of their old treasures from Heatherington had been transported.

"Have you seen Lena Adair's letter ?" Mrs. Kingscote asked, that night when Christabel and her mother were having their last words together.

"No ; but Alice has hinted that little Lena

has found the right person, and will soon be married. At least, I suppose I am to construe certain mysterious allusions Alice made in that way."

Mrs. Kingscote was silent.

"Mamma," said Christabel, "I wonder whether you and I have the same thought about it—about Lena's marriage."

"As to who it is, do you mean, my dear? I have not the faintest idea on the subject."

"Well, not as to Lena's marriage exactly, for I neither know nor care who her husband is to be; but I do quite believe that Alice's future is mixed up with it. I believe Mr. Adair will, when Lena is gone, give Cousin Nan her dismissal, and ask Alice to reign over the glories of Abbot's Court."

"My dear child, it is not like you to have such a ridiculous idea! Mr. Adair! he is older than your father, and Alice is a child—scarcely fit to be out of the schoolroom. Christabel, what reason have you for such an assertion? Moreover, Alice would never think of it, if Mr. Adair did; and I am sure neither your father nor I should entertain such a proposal for an instant."

"But if Alice's heart were set on it, mother? and I do believe it is. Alice would take any chance to free herself from her present life. She does hanker after the ornamental and all the little accessories of wealth. She does thoroughly dis-

like exertion or trouble, and she loves ease and luxury. If Mr. Adair is to be the stepping-stone to all this, Alice will use him, and be, according to her ideas, happy."

"I think you are rather hard on Alice," said Mrs. Kingscote, with a gentle sigh. "Poor child!"

"Don't sigh and look sad about it, darling mother," said Christabel; "I almost wish I had not thought aloud to you, but the habit is so strong to tell you everything. After all, my thoughts may mean nothing, but I have not done my talk yet; so wait five minutes before we say good-night. I want to tell you how happy Bertha Francis is at Wells, and how strong her brother is getting. And mother, she asks me if I have remembered my promise to her—if I have tried to begin prayers morning and night. Is not this a good time to start now we are settling in a new home?"

"My dear, it will be very difficult. I do not think I can read, and I am sure your father will not. No; I could not ask him," said Mrs. Kingscote, nervously; "and then there are the children and the servants. Harold will be going off to school, your father to the office—it would be impossible, in the morning, at any rate."

"Dearest mother, let me try what I can do; if you will give me leave I will speak to papa and the servants, and as to the children they must do as they are bid. Mother, some words

have haunted me so much lately as applying to us : ' There is no fear of God before their eyes.' I do wish, and I do pray that this may not be true of us any longer."

" Outward things mean very little sometimes, Christabel. Mere forms will not avail us anything."

" No, not of themselves ; but, dearest mother, there are some acts of service which, if the Spirit gives them life, are necessary to us as proofs of our allegiance."

" Well, we will feel our way about it, only do not make a disturbance by any fresh plans. It would also be much worse to begin, and fail to carry on the prayers evening and morning, than not to begin at all—much worse."

Then mother and daughter separated for the night ; but as Christabel was leaving the room her mother called her to return. " You have heard no more of that dreadful Mr. Beresford, Christabel ?"

" No, indeed, mamma, or I should have told you ; he is effectually silenced—he will forget us all now."

" I hope so, I am sure ; but he is just the sort of man never to forget what he may think an injury, and you seem to have spoken very plainly to him, Christabel."

" Of course I did mamma ; I only wish I had said a little more."

" And St. Aubyn, you hear nothing of him

either ; we have done with the Beresfords now, I trust." Christabel paused before she answered, and her mother went on, " Such a boyish love as his would not bind you, Christabel ; you are in no way bound, years will go on, and St. Aubyn will forget you, and you would not let what he said stand in the way of a brighter and a better fate."

" Mother," said Christabel, " I did not pledge myself by so many words to St. Aubyn to remember him, neither will I pledge myself to forget him. Will that satisfy you ? "

Mrs. Kingscote smiled, " You satisfy me, my darling ; give me another good-night kiss."

Christabel went swiftly back to her mother, and held her fast in her arms. " Dearest mother, good-night," and then she was gone.

So the new life opened in Adelaide Square, Bristol ; and, by degrees, strange things grew familiar, and before the Christmas bells rang out from the church towers the old home at Heatherington was taking its place in the shadowy past, and the younger members of the Kingscote family were living in the present, and finding their interests centre there. This adaptation to the circumstances in which we unexpectedly find ourselves placed is a changeless and kindly law of our nature, and the young especially bow beneath it in a very short time. The twins forgot to regret the freedom of their life at Heatherington, in the excitement of getting a good place in their class in the little boys' school, kept by

two ladies, in a quiet street not far from Adelaide Square ; and Katie was taming down into something more of the town-bred young lady, who, at fourteen, must be content to walk instead of scamper, and comport herself with gravity and decorum at the class for morning pupils, which she attended, not far from the Grammar School, where Harold was really making his way. For Harold prospered there, and at the end of his first term distinguished himself, and was moved into a higher form ; while Alice dreamed her day-dreams, and consoled herself with the society of a married daughter of Sir Richard Talwyn, who lived in the York Crescent, at Clifton ; and, finding Alice pretty and popular, would often send down a note of invitation for her to spend the day with her, and sometimes drive up in her handsome carriage to the door of 2, Adelaide Square, and carry Alice away with her.

Mr. Kingscote was punctual in his attendance at the office : still his wife and Christabel often sighed as they saw him set off with a firm, resolute step, but a cloud upon his brow, and with the air of a man who was, with a strong effort, trying to retrieve the mistakes of the past, as a distasteful task set before him to accomplish. He grew more, rather than less, gloomy and morose at home ; and many were the heart-aches which he gave his gentle wife, who, unlike her children, lived in the past, and treasured up

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memories of the days when her Philip was proud and fond of her, and no cloud had ever come between them. Her health, never very strong, decidedly failed in Bristol; and there was something in her gentle and persistent refusal to go out for air and exercise which touched Christabel often to tears.

"I cannot walk in the town, dear child," she would say, "and I am not strong enough to get into the country; besides I am very comfortable in this room, with the flowers in the window, of which you take such care. I think I am turning into an artist again," she said, one day, holding up a water-colour drawing of the familiar view from the cliff-house, the sky all burning with the glory of sunset. When I have time to spare from the mending and stitching, it does me more good to forget the streets and houses in trying to recall the dear old scenes on paper, than to walk about the pavements, past the shops, Christabel."

"This is beautiful, mother," Christabel said, "and what have you written underneath?"

"Words which I hope may apply to me, dear, at last. Look, that ship is sailing into the harbour; it has had a rough voyage: sometimes in the stormy night, and sometimes in the cloudy day, but it is all over now, and 'at evening time it is light.'"

Christabel turned away to hide her tears, and began to examine her carefully nurtured geraniums, which she was trying to keep through the

winter, and which she daily freed from the town dirt and "blacks," which drove the two old Heatherington servants almost distracted. "It is like washing of the blackamoor white," old Susan had said of the paint round her kitchen window ; "and as to the girl Mattie's face, I tell her it's that altered, by the coats of dirt she gets on it, that her own mother would not know it."

Christabel had laughed then, but there were times when she was painfully conscious that her own hands suffered from the city dirt, and that it was necessary to perform ablutions on herself and the children on an average half a dozen times, when at Heatherington once sufficed. So trivial all this sounds, and such small annoyances as these are scarcely worth recording ; but they were, nevertheless, the trifles which made the sum of Christabel's life in those first few months in Adelaide Square. Pretty muslin curtains hung yellow and limp in a few days, and had entirely lost their freshness in as many weeks ; the bright clean paint got dim and dull ; the chintz furniture in Mrs. Kingscote's room, which Christabel had made such an effort to get, with its little rose buds and leaves clustering over it, was very soon infected by the general dingy air of the town ; and if windows were opened to let in fresh air, that air came in bearing on its way the dust and dirt which so despoiled everything. Continual washing at the laundry brings continual expense, and after a few

weeks Christabel had to learn that hard lesson of town life, that we must take things as they are, and choose between the air and the accompaniment it brings of little black messengers from hundreds of neighbouring chimneys. Christabel was young and brave and cheerful, and now and then a brisk walk with one or two of her young brothers and sisters up Park Street, and onwards to Clifton Down, would refresh her, and send her back to her city home to be more than ever its light and gladness. On two or three rare occasions she managed to persuade her father to accompany her ; but as the winter days closed in early these expeditions became less frequent. Still Christabel was never without sources of interest, and could find beauty nearer at hand than Clifton Down, with its grassy slopes and mossy glades slanting down to the base of the grey St. Vincent's rocks, or leading away to the Sea wall, from whence can be seen the river widening into the channel, and the Welsh hills lying quiet and calm in the far distance. Not every day, not every week were these things within her reach, but a very short walk took her to the Cathedral on her way to meet Harold and Katie as they came from school, and she liked to stroll round the quaint old church, which, insignificant as it is as a cathedral, has nevertheless many a carved niche and pointed turret which repay examination. Gradually it became Christabel's habit to get to the Cathedral for evening service, and

from this a great comfort rose. It was altogether new to her, and very often she came out from that temporary cessation in the business of the day strengthened and refreshed. The voices of the choir and the swell of the organ soothed her, and by degrees the merely dreamy sense of enjoyment, which at first was prominent, became an earnest hearty joining in the psalms themselves; while prayers, not only of the lips, ascended from her heart, and the deep meaning of the lessons from the Bible, appointed to be read daily in the church, dawned upon her soul. Quite imperceptibly was this change coming over Christabel: she was at home even more bright and thoughtful for them all; but the quick impatient words became less and less frequent, and there was a something about her which more than ever won the allegiance of those about her. "The anchor of the soul" came to be less visionary and more real; and there was ever within, in the inmost circle of the inner self, where lie hid the dreams and aspirations of youth, a hope, springing fresh and green, that one day she and St. Aubyn should meet again, that she would not need to be ashamed to answer his questions then, to be to him the San Christabel of his dreams, and show him that through years she could be steadfast and true to the love of her early girlhood—a love which, as she looked back, she found had been always the same, though unseen by any eye and unsuspected even

by herself, till the boy had seemed suddenly to be changed into the man, and told her of his love on the hill-side, where the foxgloves nodded in the breeze, and the waves chimed their old melody as they kissed the round boulders of the grey pebble ridge on the bright May morning, which now looked so far away, and belonged to a very different life to the one which went on in Adelaide Square.

And all this time St. Aubyn Beresford was bearing the manifold hardships and trials of those who go out to seek their fortunes in other countries. Disappointment and vexation met him at every turn. Cotton was planted in the Brazils, and to a few fortunate planters the cotton had been touched by a talisman, and turned quickly into gold. But St. Aubyn found that to make any way beyond the mere receipts of a labourer in England, money was necessary. Money to buy and to plant, and to pay for labour also. Money to buy needful implements, and to meet the requirements of a tropical climate, and a start in a new hemisphere. The introduction given to St. Aubyn by the vicar of Northam had not been of very much service to him; and when he wrote to his uncle for the promised remittance of the sum due to him on his coming of age, his brave spirit was depressed by the coldness of the people about him; and had his uncle but replied kindly, he would have given up the unequal struggle, and returned

to England. But months went on, and no letter came. At last, when several mails had arrived, and there had come no word from those who were his nearest of kin in the world, the clerk at the post-office of Campinas singled out a letter, as St. Aubyn asked almost hopelessly the often repeated question in the half-Spanish patois which is generally spoken in that country. It was his uncle's writing at last, and as he opened the thin blue envelope a cheque fell out for half the sum which was justly his ! The other half was retained, Mr. Beresford said, to be some set-off against the eight years' board, lodging, and clothing which he had given him.

The small, close, lawyer's writing compressed much in a little compass. There was the information that St. Aubyn's father, with his wife and children, was at last shipped for Australia ; that it was a relief to Mr. and Miss Beresford that a name so disgraced had been blotted out of the country. Then came two or three pieces of local gossip, about which the poor boy cared nothing, and then the assurance of his good-will and that of his aunt Rachel, before he signed himself his affectionate uncle. But a diminutive P.S. caught St. Aubyn's eye, still flashing with the sense of injustice which had so often kindled it, in the little office in Bridge Court at Bideford ; but the fire died out as he read the few, the very few words which were written by design, and had been kept to the last.

"It may be some satisfaction to you to know that the Kingscote family, who suffered through your father's misconduct, are doing well in Bristol. The eldest daughter is, we hear, to marry the clergyman who was their enforced guest so many weeks at Heatherington; the second is to be mistress of Abbot's Court."

And as those words were written, Mr. Beresford knew that he was telling an absolute falsehood. The *on dit* was simply his sister's and his own surmises; but he intended the shaft to strike deep, and it was not "at random sent!"

He had, as we have seen, a personal pique against Christabel, which he thus hoped to satisfy, and effectually to crush out of St. Aubyn's thoughts any absurd fancies which he might cherish. But it was not in the nature of a mean soul like Mr. Beresford's to comprehend the dull, heavy, hopeless sense of loss, which weighed upon the young heart after the first sharp pain these words caused had passed away. The spring and fountain of hope seemed to die within him, and for a time all work and effort looked vain and impossible. By degrees the fixed purpose with which he had come out began to reassert itself. By years of patient labour he had said he would do his best to restore to the Kingscotes a part, at least, of what they had lost by his father's fault, and he would still keep firm to that purpose, and strive to fulfil it. As to the rest, he must accept his fate;

and what was he, to win Christabel ; why should he have ever hoped to have love like hers ! Then came to St. Aubyn a long and fierce struggle with the fever so common to the climate, when he lay between life and death, cared for only from motives of charity, and left to fight his way back to health as best he could. But he weathered the storm, and his strong young manhood renewed itself, and was borne up on eagles' wings to strive once more towards the attainment of the end he kept in view. He heard no more from Northam, and earthly friends seemed to fail him ; but the prayer of his dying mother was to be answered, though in a way he little dreamed, and his feet were kept in the right path. That path diverged widely from Christabel's ; but there is one meeting-point, one against which time and space are powerless. It is fixed and sure, above and beyond, and superior to, the changes and chances of this troublesome world.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WINTER'S NIGHT.

" Out of the bosom of the air,
Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the harvest fields forsaken,
 Silent and soft and slow,
Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take,
Suddenly, shape, in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession,
 The troubled sky reveals
 The grief it feels."

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

THE busy streets of Bristol were hushed to a strange and almost universal stillness one January evening. It was yet early, for the clocks had not struck eight, and there were passengers on foot and in carriages who were obliged by business or pleasure to meet the chilly breath of the snowy night. What we popularly call an old-fashioned winter had set in a few days before, with a hard black frost,

and it had been succeeded by a somewhat lower temperature, and a fall of snow so heavy and so deep that the lanes and streets were all but impassable; and many idle hands had been employed to sweep pathways along the trackless waste, and clear passages before the doors of private dwellings and public offices. As night closed in the sky brightened, and the snow, which had been coming down thick and fast all day, ceased; only a few large flakes danced and fluttered from the clouds, where great rifts were now seen, and a moon nearly at the full came sailing forth into spaces of deep mysterious blue, hiding herself ever and anon beneath the veil of fleecy vapours which skirted the huge masses of mountainous clouds as they parted further and further asunder, and floated away towards the south. Then in the moonlight the old city rose up pure and white, every gabled roof covered with Carrara marble, every church tower bearing snowy wreaths on pinnacle and turret, every mullioned window clearly defined by soft lines of spotless purity. Over the quiet homes of the dead in the silent churchyard, over the homes of the living in the crescents and terraces of Clifton, and over the streets and squares of Bristol, the same pure mantle was thrown. Roughnesses and inequalities of surface were for the time smoothed out, and street and suburb lay in the same unbroken beauty as the fields and meadows and the hill-sides, far away beyond the reach of

the whistle of the engine, which was now heard so shrill and clear in the keen frosty air. There were lights in the windows of Saint Olave's church that evening, and a few dark figures were coming from under the snow-wreathed porch just as the clocks were striking eight. Evening service was over, a week-day service which the Vicar had lately established, and which had scarcely yet increased beyond the two or three gathered in His name who was surely there in the midst of them.

St. Olave's was the parish church of Adelaide Square, and Christabel Kingscote was hastening home alone, and was within a few yards of her own door, when the Vicar overtook her.

"No weather keeps you at home," he said; "you are never afraid to face heat, or rain, or snow."

"Why should I? I am not sugar or salt," she answered merrily, "and am not likely to melt away. Besides, on such a night as this there is nothing but pleasure in being out. It is quite glorious."

"Even in Bristol," he said, with a laugh. "And how is Mrs. Kingscote?"

Immediately Christabel's voice changed. "She is much the same; quite shut up, of course. I do not let her leave the drawing-room now. Come in and see her."

"Bertha said I was to take you home to supper with us."

"Oh no, thanks ; not this evening ; but do come and see mamma ; a visit from you always cheers her so much."

Gilbert Francis made no rejoinder, but followed Christabel into the hall when Susan opened the door.

"Let me shake the snow off your cloak and hat, pray do, Miss Christabel. Dear me, church is all very well on Sundays, but not on working days and in such coarse weather too !"

"Take my cloak and hat, Susan, if you like, but you will not have the pleasure of shaking from them a single flake of snow, it is a beautiful night. There now, my goloshes are off, I am in a state of perfection, and quite fit to go into the drawing-room. What is this ?"

"Some game, which came not half-an-hour ago. I thought you would like to take it up to the mistress."

But Christabel did not like to take it up : a glance at the card round the neck of the brace of pheasants made her sigh, and she said, "From Abbot's Court : how pretty they are ! let them be hung safely, Susan. Now, Mr. Francis."

He started, as if from a dream, when she uttered his name. He had been looking at her throughout this conversation with Susan, and thinking of her in her girlhood, as he had first seen her, and comparing that time with this. For years had gone by, seven long years, and Christabel had changed, as every one does

change, in that time ; some more, some less, but surely, if unconsciously, to themselves, and imperceptibly to those who see them every day ; still, years must leave their trace, and the youngest and fairest have to acknowledge it, as well as the wayworn and aged.

At this moment, with the colour in her cheeks which brisk walking in the frosty air had called there, and her eyes sparkling with exercise, Christabel looked young for her seven-and-twenty years ; young, and in Gilbert's eyes, infinitely more attractive in her mature than in her dawning womanhood. He was outwardly more changed than she was. He was dressed in the strictly clerical fashion, less common then than now. His hair was cut close to his head, and he wore a beard which had been first allowed to grow when he had wintered abroad for his health, and which he left unmolested, as a protection to his throat, on his return to England. He was utterly regardless of the remarks which were made upon it, by parishioners and friends, for such appendages were even more unusual in those days than the long straight coat. The mouth had been always the weakest part of Gilbert Francis' face, and this was now hidden, while the outline of his well-chiselled nose and strongly-defined brow were remarkable, as was also the expression of his grave, earnest eyes.

Mrs. Kingscote brightened when she saw him enter the drawing-room with Christabel, and

raising herself in her chair, welcomed him with a sweet smile. Then she turned anxiously to Christabel, "You are not wet, dearest. Susan said it was such a dreadful night to go out."

"Dear mother, it is a radiant night. The moon is so bright. Now, I must make your tea," she said, ringing the bell, "and Mr. Francis must stay and have some too."

Mr. Francis seemed not disinclined to do so, and consigned himself to an easy-chair before the fire, with evident satisfaction.

"We heard from papa to-day; did Bertha tell you?" Christabel asked presently.

"Yes, good news, I hope?"

"Very good," Mrs. Kingscote said; "his business is nearly completed, and he expects to be home early in February. Sir Richard finds my husband's services so valuable he could not do without them now. Both the voyages to the West Indies have been so successful."

"And I hope papa will reap the benefit this time," Christabel said. "Next summer we are going to live in the country once more—are we not, mother?"

Mrs. Kingscote shook her head, and a scarcely perceptible shiver passed over her. "Summer is so far off, dear;" and then she began a little hacking cough, which Christabel called her torment, and which had certainly increased very much of late. "The boys ought to be at home by this time," Mrs. Kingscote said,

anxiously, the crimson flush on her cheeks deepening, and settling there in one fixed spot.

"Dear mother, no! imagine a Christmas-tree party separating at half-past eight! Gemini will not be home till ten. Do not be angry with me, mother; I told them they might stay."

"When do Harold and Katie come home from Stoke?" Mr. Francis asked.

"Not till next week."

"No!" said Mrs. Kingscote, "and that reminds me, Mr. Francis, that I want your sister to use her influence with Christabel, and insist on her going to Stoke for the last two days of Harold and Katie's visit. The Talwyns want it so much, and so do I. I am really quite well enough to be left for two days; and Christabel ought not, and must not be buried here, as she is, with me—never leaving me night or day."

"Mother!" said Christabel, "how can you say so, when I have left you this evening for a whole hour, and this morning for two."

"But not for any relaxation; only to go to church, and to see your poor people," said Mrs. Kingscote, with the feverish excitement of an invalid. "Mr. Francis, I wish you would take my part, and advise Christabel to go to Stoke."

"I am sorry you are so tired of me, mother, and that you are determined to get rid of me. You cannot expect Mr. Francis to aid and abet your schemes for turning me out of the house against my will," was the light, jesting reply, as

she placed a little table by her mother's side, and brought her a cup of tea and a plate of toast, cut and buttered in the most tempting way.

But the smile faded from her bright face, and her jesting manner changed as her mother said, "Oh! nothing to eat, dear. I can't be always eating; give Mr. Francis the toast, I only want tea;" and the pretty china plate was pushed away by the long slender fingers almost impatiently.

Christabel quietly removed the toast, and carried it over to their guest, with a cup of tea. He had been very silent, and something of his old lazy nonchalant manner had crept over him. He looked, just then, very unlike the earnest, energetic parish priest, which St. Olave's had accepted, with some astonishment and some reluctance, a year before this time.

Now he roused himself and said, "Yes, I think you should go to Stoke, Miss Kingscote; and, indeed, further than Stoke, and extend your absence for more than two days. Why cannot Katie come home and relieve you?"

"Katie cannot miss the festivities at Stoke on the fourteenth. It would be a great pity if she did, as they will be pure enjoyment to her and none to me."

"Well then, there is Mrs. Adair; why not ask her to come and be useful?"

"As if Mr. Adair would allow it! as if——" Then, seeing her mother's distressed face, she

said, "We will not talk any more about it now. Harold gave me this book on New Year's day ; have you seen it ?"

Mr. Francis took the hint, and talked pleasantly for half an hour on a variety of subjects, till he saw Mrs. Kingscote was tired, and then he bid her good-night.

"Wait one moment," Christabel said, "while I run upstairs for the copy of a chant and hymn tune I promised Bertha."

Gilbert waited, but not in the drawing-room, and when Christabel returned with the music she saw him standing on the stairs.

"Here is the music," she said.

He took it from her, but lingered.

"When did your mother see Dr. Musgrave last ?" he asked.

She caught his meaning at once, and instead of answering his question, said, "Do you think she is worse ? Do you think there is any change ?"

"I cannot tell," he replied, "but a doctor could. Will you not ask Dr. Musgrave to call to-morrow ?"

"I would, only she does not wish it. My father has no faith in doctors, and always dislikes one to be sent for. Besides, Dr. Musgrave was here just before Christmas. He only said she must have great care and watching, and freedom from worry, and I do try to spare her as much as I can."

"I am sure you do," he answered, earnestly ; "but I think the responsibility is too much for you, alone as you are. It is perfectly incomprehensible to me how the others can take their own pleasure, and leave you all the anxiety and care."

"Katie is very young," Christabel pleaded ; "Harold is engrossed with his college life, and has made so many friends that we cannot wonder he finds society attractive ; the twins are but children, only twelve, you know ; and Alice——"

"Alice lives the most self-indulgent life ; and is infinitely more spoiled by my uncle than poor Lena ever was. What profanation such marriages are !"

"They are a great mystery," Christabel rejoined ; "but Alice is content and happy in her own way."

"I deny it ; it is not possible," said Gilbert, almost vehemently. "What can such natures know of happiness ? What to eat, what to drink, and what to wear, with the power to eat, drink, and wear what they like—to fritter away a lifetime in such folly—is that happiness ?" Then he added more gently, "Forgive me ; I ought not to forget she is your sister, poor child. But to go back to what we were saying. I think you should let Dr. Musgrave see your mother ; and if he reports well, go to Stoke ; the change will refresh you and strengthen you. Bertha

and I will come in very often and see Mrs. Kingscote."

Christabel shook her head. "She will wonder where I am; I must go back to her. I will try and manage about the doctor; but she is so nervously anxious to do all my father wishes in his absence. It is so touching to hear her continually referring to him, and trying to decide what would please him."

"When do you think he will be here?"

"He said early in February; but it might be sooner. But I must go back to her now. Good-night."

Then she was gone, and Mr. Francis opened the hall door and went out into the snowy night. The house which he and his sister occupied was one of a row rather inappropriately called "Myrtle Place." It had certainly no trace of greenery left near it now; and the narrow paved courts in front of the houses were guiltless of a shrub or flower in the brightest summer day; nor was there even an attempt made to cover the small enclosure with melancholy smoke-dried grass.

Bertha Francis had at first thought she would have the hard uncompromising paving stones removed, and lay down a few feet of turf instead. But a little experience convinced her that it would have had dreary and unsatisfactory results, so the square court was left unmolested. There was the tap of a crutch in the passage,

as Gilbert knocked at his own door, and Bertha opened it, exclaiming, "I am all alone, the servants wished to go together to the grand festivity at St. Pancras' school, so I gave them leave to do so. Oh! what a night!" she said, holding the door a moment before closing it. "So you did not bring Christabel, after all?"

"No, I went in with her after service for a few minutes—an hour, I ought to say," he corrected, glancing at the clock on the chimneypiece, as he and his sister entered their sitting-room together. A bright pretty little room, where the holly leaves were glistening in the lamp light, and wreaths of evergreen were tastefully arranged round the engravings which decorated the walls.

Myrtle Place had provided the only available dwelling for the vicar of St. Olave's and his sister; though, as the churchwarden said on the day when Gilbert had first arrived to look at the church, "There is no call for you, sir, to live in the parish. The old gentleman, who was buried a week ago, resided in Great George Street, which, although it can't be called Clifton, is a good step nearer than any houses in this neighbourhood, sir."

But Gilbert had disagreed with his churchwarden, and had felt he "*had a call*" to live as near his people as possible, and to identify himself with them and their interests; and this he had done so thoroughly that, in a few short months, the whole aspect of the church and the

parish was changed. An insensible influence was exercised for good, and schools, and clothing clubs for the women, and a reading-room for the men, had arisen under his care, and were thriving in spite of prejudice and discouragement.

The vicar and his sister were not without some private means, for the income of the living would not have sufficed for all they did in St. Olave's. Now, with Bertha's excellent management, enough and more than enough, was left for their own personal comfort ; and these were happy days for her : her prayers and hopes seemed to have been answered and fulfilled. Her brother was in earnest now—thoroughly in earnest, heart and soul and powers of mind and body were all directed to one grand end. What was it to Bertha that St. Olave's was a poor living, in the heart of smoky, dirty Bristol. What was it to her that she lived in Myrtle Place, that the rooms were small and inconvenient, and the neighbourhood had no attractions. Was it not her highest pleasure to know that Gilbert's ordination vows had not been a mere empty sound to him. There might be times when she would wish to see him more gentle in his judgment of others, more tolerant of those who differed from him, and of late she had fancied she had seen a cloud over him at times, which she could not explain.

It was so this evening, as he sat more silently than was his wont, and answering what questions she asked him as concisely as possible.

The two maid-servants had returned from St. Pancras' school feast, and the neat little trim parlour-maid came in to say, "A person wants to see the Vicar."

"Who is she?" he asked. "Tell her to send in her name."

Martha disappeared, and soon came back, saying, "It is Mrs. Watts, sir, who keeps a lodging-house in Church Row; one of her lodgers is very bad, and he wants you to come to see him. She thinks he may not live till morning, sir, or she would not trouble you."

"Tell Mrs. Watts I will come directly," Gilbert said, rousing himself, and preparing to draw on the boots which he had only just exchanged for his slippers.

"Good-bye, Bertha; do not let this fire out, I have some writing to get through to-night."

"Not much, I trust," was the rejoinder; "Mrs. Watts ought to have sent earlier. I trust you will not be gone long."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mrs. Watts, whom Gilbert found waiting on him in the passage. "I know it is a wintry night to take you out of doors, but I am that distracted I don't know what to do; and you always say, sir——"

Mrs. Watts was a stout woman, and very short breasted, and she found it very hard to keep up to the Vicar's pace and talk at the same time.

"It is quite right of you to come, Mrs. Watts. Who is your lodger?"

"Ah! that's what I don't know; he is not a common sort of man, I can tell you that much. He came to my house last Wednesday, and, says he, 'I want a bed-room for a night, as reasonable as you can let me have it.' Says I to him, 'My charges are always reasonable,' and I gave him the top attic, which is a tidy room enough; and I was full everywhere else. Out of that there room he has never set foot for ten days; we left him to himself, as no lodgers don't like no interference. I ain't never the one to interfere; but this morning when I carried him his cup of tea I saw a change; he was all wild and excited, and raved when I spoke to him, raved dreadful, and the doctor said this was a brain fever, and he will not have strength to hold out. Watts has been all this afternoon with him, and I must say, does his part; but, dear me, there's the second floor, not to say the first, complaining of the noise; and 'tis something more than we can stand to hear him yelling out, poor creature. When the fits of wildness are over, he lays like a lamb. He has been a handsome man in his time, and a gentleman, too, if I ain't mistaken. Here we are, sir!" and Mrs. Watts stopped before the door of the corner house of Church Row, lying like all the rest of Bristol, pure and white, with its snowy covering over it.

The murky darkness of the passage, lighted by an oil lamp, contrasted with this dazzling

purity without, where the moon was turning every tiny flake into glittering crystal. Gilbert followed Mrs. Watts up the narrow stairs, and saw her give an admonitory slap to a child of seven or eight years old, who peeped out from a door as they passed.

"Go back this minute!" was Mrs. Watts' suppressed and wrathful salutation, as the child, not to be repulsed, came out on the landing and said, in a provoking voice, "Mother says she will give notice to-morrow, she can't stand the noise!" Mrs. Watts stumped up the garret stairs before Gilbert, and duly registered in her own mind that she was to remember to serve out that child for her impertinence, in the face of the Vicar too, the very first opportunity.

Gilbert Francis had to bend his head as he entered the room where the sick man lay. The roof sloped in one part, but there was a large window, and the room was a good size. Stooping over the bed was a tall strong man, who was forcibly holding the sufferer in his place. "It is getting almost too much for me, Sarah," he said as his wife entered the room; "have you brought the parson? He is trying to fling himself out of bed, and if he once does that, he'll be out of the window."

"Has the doctor been here this evening?"

"No, not he; we've sent, and sent, but he won't stir; he knows there's no pay for this poor chap, he has little enough belonging to him."

Gilbert Francis approached the bed, and taking his place by it, said to Mr. Watts, "Leave him to me, and I will stay with him till you summon the doctor, Mr. Drake, is it not? tell him he must come at once!"

As Mr. Watts relinquished his grasp of the sick man, Gilbert took his place, but the paroxysm was for the time past, and the man lay still from exhaustion. He was apparently about fifty years of age, and in spite of the effects of illness might be called handsome. His face was haggard and thin, but the features were good, and his hands were well formed, and did not look like those of a working man; and Gilbert saw at once that Mrs. Watts was right in her supposition that her lodger had seen better days.

"What are we to do, sir," Mrs. Watts asked, "if this goes on? Willing I may be, but look at all that is upon me, with my own family and lodgers. There, he is off again!"

And before Gilbert could reply, the sick man had begun to scream and make the house resound with his cries, while he found it necessary to put out all his strength to hold him in bed.

After half an hour had gone by Mr. Drake, the doctor, arrived, and talked his professional talk to Gilbert, while he poured a sleeping draught down the invalid's throat, and put a blister at the back of his neck. "I have little expectation of his rallying," Mr. Drake said. "Perhaps he had better go to the hospital."

"I was thinking of the same thing," said Gilbert, "but we must wait till the morning, there may be a change then. Have you no idea who he is, Mrs. Watts? is there no luggage with his name on it?"

"No; he has next to nothing belonging to him; there is a rough pilot jacket, and another pair of trowsers, but only one shirt with this mark; you see it is a fine garment," said the good woman; "and here is the mark, the only mark I can find on anything."

"The doctor, who was anxious to get home again on this snowy night, looked abruptly at the clothing, merely saying, "Yes, yes, no clue at all; well, I expect this draught will keep him quiet for a few hours. I will look in again in the morning. Good evening, Mr. Francis; this is an extraordinary spell of winter, reminding one of old times; good evening." And the doctor stumbled down the steep stairs, having first given his head an inconvenient blow against the sloping roof by the door.

"What are those initials, Mrs. Watts?" said Gilbert, taking the shirt in his hands, and holding it to the flaring tallow candle, which gave a less certain light than the moon shining through the frosted panes of the curtainless window.

"F. R. B." Gilbert deciphered. Only initials; and, as Mr. Drake said, giving no clue. Then he turned back again to the bed where the sick man lay, now breathing heavily under the

influence of the opiate, and looked earnestly at him—earnestly and sadly. What was his history, and were there any living ones who would give all they possessed to be standing by him there if they only could? Or was he deserted and forsaken? Was he the last left on earth of a large family? Was he solitary and alone in life, as he was so soon to be in death? In vain it was for the clergyman to question thus with himself; no answer could be given; no solution to the mystery granted. Then Gilbert bent his knee, and bowing his head, prayed by the lowly bed aloud, in clear distinct tones, commending the sufferer to Jesus, and entreating that he might gain pardon for sin, and an entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Mrs. Watts and her husband were not people destitute of feeling and sympathy. They agreed to share the watch that night, and Gilbert was struck with the cheerful alacrity with which Mrs. Watts made her preparations for her vigil.

“He ain’t so old but he may have a mother,” she said, “and, drove as I am, I would not let him die with no one near for her sake. There is some Mary he is always calling for in his ravings. Once or twice he has said he saw her, and she was beckoning to him; but then the fancies of people struck for death are wonderful; for he is struck for death, I do believe.”

Dr. Musgrave answered Christabel’s summons

the next day, and she followed him from the drawing-room with a beating heart. He would gladly have avoided her questioning. He disliked to give pain, in the first place ; and in the second, his creed was that it was necessary to keep up hope in the minds of his patients themselves, and in their nurses also.

"Will you come into the dining-room one minute, Dr. Musgrave," Christabel said, as he turned at the top of the staircase to let her pass.

Dr. Musgrave looked at his watch, as if to intimate that his time was precious, and then he said, "My dear Miss Kingscote, your mother is very much the same as when I saw her last ; there can be no improvement expected in such weather as this : we must hope for better things as the spring advances."

Christabel's clear eyes were turned full on the doctor. "Will my mother ever see the spring?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed, I trust so," he replied, flinching a little from those steadfast eyes. "I have written a fresh prescription, and I will call again in a few days. Your mother has been speaking to me about *you*," he added, playfully. "She says you need a change, and is very anxious you should go to Stoke for the ball on the 14th. If only for two nights, she thinks it will refresh you and do you good. Come, this is pleasant medicine, and I strongly recommend it. That ought to have some weight, surely !"

But Christabel could not smile as the doctor did, a heavy weight lay at her heart, and she only said, gravely, "I could not leave my mother, certainly not, till my father's return. He may be here almost any day now, and then I may think of going away, but not till then."

"Well, remember I give you full leave of absence," was the doctor's parting remark, before he stepped into the brougham, and pursued his round of visits.

"I should like you to go to Stoke, darling," Mrs. Kingscote urged several times during the next few days, "just for two nights."

Then there came letters from Katie and Harold, and finally one from Alice Adair. She and her elderly husband had also been invited to Stoke for the 14th, Lady Talwyn being sensible that Mr. Adair, of Abbot's Court, was a very desirable person to introduce at her parties. Harold was also welcome at Stoke as a nephew of Sir Richard's, as an Oxford undergraduate, and a man of whom great things were expected. Katie, too, with her good nature and musical talents, was found convenient in a country-house full of guests. And Lady Talwyn, who had no presentable relations of her own, was only too thankful to avail herself of the Kingscotes, and make them useful to her in that hot struggle she had been making for so many years, to get into the upper ranks of society. Ah, me! what a cruel struggle this is, and

how desperate is the effort: how disappointing the results. Nevertheless, the world is very willing to be fêted and caressed; and riches and the appliances of wealth cover a multitude of defects. People put up with vulgarity, and provincialisms, and lost aspirates, for the sake of being entertained, and especially in so princely a fashion as was the rule at Stoke Bishop. It is true that some grand lady, who claimed descent from "an hundred earls," might think it necessary to apologize in some sort to another, whose ancestor had come over with the unscrupulous Norman, about appearing at Lady Talwyn's house.

It is true that they talked her over as "a good-natured old creature, who understood how to make things go well." It is true that they canvassed any breach of manners at Stoke Bishop very freely; and were sharp to detect the least failure in the prescribed code which might be exhibited by Sir Richard's daughters. These ladies would glance down perhaps from the heights of inherited title with profound contempt on a knighthood, whose imaginary spurs were won by a mayoralty; but still, Stoke Bishop had its attractions, to which few could be insensible; and Lady Talwyn, if looked coldly on in London, and shirked as occasion demanded there, was all very well in the country, and no one could deny that a week at Stoke Bishop was a very good thing in its way.

"Yes, darling," Mrs. Kingscote would repeat with the half-fretful, half-anxious pleading of an invalid; "I really wish you to be at this party. Your sisters will both be there, and why should you not be seen and known? I shall get on very well for two days. Dr. Musgrave says I am better rather than worse, and you may trust me to do nothing imprudent in your absence. Sir Richard wrote himself the other day, and begged that you would go to Stoke Bishop on the 14th; and Alice will come on the 13th, stop here to luncheon, and then drive you out to Stoke. We must see that there is a nice luncheon for Alice: poor Alice!" her mother wound up with a sigh.

"Why do you wish me so much to be at Stoke, mother? I have paid two visits there since we lived at Bristol, and surely that may suffice, may it not?"

"Why do I wish you to go?" her mother repeated, "because I cannot bear to think of your youth passing away as it does here."

"As it has done, you mean, mamma. I am quite elderly now, and must have my own way." Then seeing the cloud on her mother's face, she said, "I am so happy to let Katie have all the society, and Alice all the fine things; and as to society, there is none better than yours."

Mrs. Kingscote shook her head, and was silent. Presently she said, "You will marry and be a happy wife yet, I hope, Christabel; you have

many bright glad years before you, and when I am gone, there will always be a pleasant memory for you, of all you have been to me, though often I feel you must have had a sad and weary time."

"Mother! you must not say so. I have been very happy with you, happier than I can be again, perhaps; life would be so different without you." Christabel did not trust herself to say more; that the time was drawing near when life would have to go on without her mother, she could not refuse to believe; but she had not courage to dwell on it now, and tried to rally herself.

"Well, mother," she said cheerfully, after a pause, "if you insist on my going to Stoke, I suppose I must go. I will get out my one evening dress and my best Sunday one, and see if I can smarten them up for the great occasion."

"You must have a new evening dress, dear; it will amuse me to watch you get it ready; as you do Katie's, and as you used to do poor Alice's in old times."

"Poor Alice's! mamma. What would she say—the rich lady of the family; stepmother to Lady L'Estrange, the belle and reigning beauty wherever she goes?"

"Poor little Lady L'Estrange! I wonder if she is happy. There was always something attractive about her; and her living so much abroad seems to cut her off from old ties. It must be three or four years since the L'Estranges were in England."

"Yes, quite. Lena has never been at Abbot's Court since she lost her little boy."

"What a happy thing it is Alice has no children," Mrs. Kingscote said.

"I don't think so, mother. It would have done Mr. Adair heaps of good to have some boys to hunt about that place, eat a few superfluous nectarines and grapes, and give those gardeners a little real work for once."

"As poor Harry and Willie did on their memorable visit; when we had that amusing letter from Willie, written in letters half an inch high, entreating to be allowed to come home."

"Yes, poor Gemini! they found the grandeur of Abbot's Court hard bondage. Here they are," she said, "just as we are talking of them;" and the twins rushed into the room. They were two fair pretty boys, looking less than their age; but though slightly made, were rosy and healthy.

"Shut the door, Gemini: mamma is in a draught. Now before it is dark I want to go and do a little shopping; one of you shall come with me, and one can stay with mother."

"Shopping! oh, I don't care for shops; I'll stay with mother," said Willie; while Harry volunteered to accompany his sister.

"I am going to buy a new dress, think of that! to please mamma," she said; "and to please myself too; for on second thoughts, mother, I remember my one evening dress has disappeared;

Katie had it for that pic-nic and archery meeting in the summer—the white muslin with the embroidered flounce, you know.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Kingscote; “and it was much too old, Christabel. What will you get?”

“Something black; I am past white muslin now.”

“Nonsense, Christabel; one would think you were forty. Nothing is so pretty as white.”

“Let me have my own way, mother, and wear black. I saw a dress in a shop in College Green, with a sprinkling of gold stars over it. I have a black silk skirt and a low body already, and I can make up this in no time. If the price does not exceed the money in my purse I mean to have it; if it does I must have black with no stars. There is not much time, this is the 7th, and there is Sunday between; so I shall have to be industrious.”

“And you will want gloves and many little things, dear. Here is a pound, which is doing nothing in my purse, as Dr. Musgrave declined the fee for his second visit to-day. Take it, darling, please.”

Mrs. Kingscote looked so well and so pleased at Christabel's decision, that she began to wonder how it was that she had been so depressed about her only a day or two before. She took the bright sovereign from her mother's hand, and kissed her, saying, “Thanks,

dearest mother ; will not father be pleased to see me in my new gown, and think I have turned over a new leaf by going to Stoke Bishop ? ”

“ Your father will not be here by the 14th, dear,” said Mrs. Kingscote, the colour fading from her face ; “ but what good spirits that last letter was written in ; how well he has managed this business for Sir Richard. I quite think that he will double the remuneration he offered before. It is wonderful to me how your father has applied himself to what, at the beginning, seemed likely to be so hard to bear. It was so noble of him to make the effort to leave Heatherington, and change every habit of life so completely.”

Poor Mrs. Kingscote, in absence she forgot all roughnesses and discourtesies, all failures of loving tenderness, which had been the characteristics of the last few years of her married life. The mantle of a love which could not really change was here thrown over all her husband's defects and shortcomings, and, like the snow lying over the face of the frost-bound earth, it softened all sharp corners and inequalities, and her Philip of other days, the husband of her youth, was again invested with the perfections which had first won and fixed her love on him long years before. She followed the same train of thought for some time after Christabel had left her, and Willie find-

ing her abstracted and disinclined to talk, soon slipped away to the garret at the top of the house, where he and his brother pursued many trades — carpentering, carving, and printing, of all of which it might fairly be said, there was more noise than work.

Christabel and Harry had a merry walk to College Green, and without any real reason Christabel felt more cheered and happy about her mother than she had done for some time, and she began to think with pleasure of seeing Harold take his part in the grand charade at Stoke Bishop, which was to form part of one evening's entertainment, and of hearing Katie play one of the great sonatas of Beethoven, with several amateur proficientes from Bath and Clifton. The black dress with the stars was not beyond Christabel's means, indeed below it, and after all was paid for, the little sundries of which her mother had spoken included, she had enough left to give her young brother a book on insects and moths which he had long wanted, and to take Willie a set of tools for carving, better than any he had ever possessed. As Christabel went to the shop knowing what she wished for, and with none of the wavering uncertainties which is so often the bane of buyers and sellers, her mission was soon accomplished; and she and Harry were at the door of Adelaide Square again in an incredibly short time. Harry was anxious to run in with his new possessions, and

his sister told him to do so while she went on to Myrtle Place to see Bertha Francis, and tell her that she had really decided to go to Stoke at last. "Put my parcel on the hall table, Harry," she said, "and don't rush madly into the drawing-room and frighten mamma; go in quietly, and show her the book and the tools, but leave me to display my finery, and tell her I shall be home in half an hour." The boy obeyed, and Christabel pursued her way to Myrtle Place alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VICAR OF ST. OLAVE'S.

"Good words, in order to do good, must come from the heart ; and if the feelings spoken of are foreign to experience, it is earnestly to be desired that they should be less familiar to the tongue."

"PROBLEMS IN HUMAN NATURE."

THE little sitting-room in Myrtle Place looked bright and cosy when Christabel went in. Bertha was busy over some books she was covering for the library her brother had begun in the parish ; and, looking up with a smile, said, "I am glad you are come, Christabel, you can help me so nicely ; there is nothing like making one's friends useful, is there ?" as Christabel took off her gloves, and began to cut out the stout brown calico for a cover.

"Gilbert is so anxious to begin this library," said Bertha ; "and as to lending the books without proper covers, it is impossible. Bristol dirt is too penetrating for that."

"I came to tell you," Christabel said, presently, "that I am going to Stoke Bishop on

the 13th. Mother seemed to wish it so much; and the idea of my dress and preparation amuses and interests her. So that I begin to think it will be very pleasant to go myself, if only to come back and tell her all about Katie's playing, and Harold's acting; and how well they get on with the Talwys. I hope I am right to go."

"I am sure you are, and it will freshen you up, Christabel, and be a change, the good effects of which you will feel afterwards, more than at the time perhaps."

"Perhaps! but I can't help wishing it were somewhere else. Now that visit I paid you at Wells, for instance, that was refreshment. The very happiest three weeks I ever spent. But mother was not so much of an invalid then. I could not leave her for three weeks now."

"Ah, that is six years ago—is it not? time goes fast. It is seven years since we first met, Christabel."

"Yes, seven last summer; how often I have thought of that first day on the terrace at Abbot's Court, and what you said about the anchor of the soul. Bertha, I think I can say I hold it fast now, and it gives a sort of security nothing else can do."

"How glad I am, dear," Bertha answered.

Christabel so seldom spoke of her own feelings, that the confidence when it came was all the more precious.

"Yes," Christabel went on, while her fingers

moved rapidly at her work. "The great hope keeps other lesser hopes green; at least, we see and feel that if that anchor is ours, sure and steadfast, we shall not drift away from what is for our good; but that we shall see the fulfilment of other hopes, *if* their fruition is wholesome for us. Coming to Bristol and leaving dear Heatherington was a great trial, but how much has come out of it which has proved for the best for us all. Harold got his first impetus to study at the Grammar School, and Katie developed so quickly at Miss Sanders'. Our father's mind was taken off from brooding over his losses by occupation, and these missions to look after the sugar plantations in the West Indies have done him so much good. It was a brave thing of him to set his shoulder to the wheel, instead of giving in at Heatherington, and getting deeper in debt and difficulty every year. Then mother," but here Christabel paused: "her health has failed in town life, and I do not think she has ever flourished here; but how she has developed in all that is beautiful and gentle, how it has been for a long time a perfect blessing only to be near her. The one cloudy and apparently hopeless spot in our horizon is Alice. But I do not know why I should give you the benefit of all this retrospect, except that you are dear old Bertha, and no one else; and there is a sort of inexplicable satisfaction in boring you with my concerns."

"They are not your concerns, personally, darling. I wish they were; I always feel, Christabel, that there is a subject on which we never touch by common consent."

Christabel's colour deepened, but she made no rejoinder; but rose from her seat, saying, "There! that is the sixth book I have done; the Vicar ought to be humbly grateful to me. Now, I must run home and make tea for Gemini, and coffee for mother; then apply myself to my black gown for the rest of the evening. It is a thin gauzy stuff, with little stars sprinkled over it. I took a fancy to it. You shall see it, of course; and Bertha, you will be as much with mother as you can, while I am away these two days?"

"Yes, indeed I will; and Gilbert has got a scheme for taking the twins with him somewhere one morning. He seems to think your mother better the last day or two. Here he comes; just in time to go home with you. Christabel is going to Stoke after all, Gilbert."

"That is right," he said, but rather abruptly added, "that poor fellow, Bertha, in Church Row, is conscious now; he has been speaking to me quite coherently."

"Have you found out who he is?" Bertha inquired.

"No; I asked him to tell me, but the question evidently distressed him. So I mean to let it rest for a day or two. The nurse thinks he will get through the fever, but she doubts if he will

live; his constitution is a shattered one. I asked him if he had a wife and children. He shook his head and turned away his face. The nurse says the name of Mary is most frequently on his lips, and another name she cannot well make out. Now, if you must go, let me see you home," he added, turning to Christabel.

The snow had lost its beauty now, and lay in grimy masses swept up against the pavement. Earthly stains had triumphed over heavenly purity, and it was only in the country that the continuance of the frost kept the white mantle unsullied. Christabel and the Vicar were on the perfectly easy terms of brother and sister. Since Gilbert had been Vicar of St. Olave's they had been brought into frequent intercourse, and Christabel had thrown herself into all his and Bertha's plans for the good of the parish with such hearty earnestness, that she was almost like a curate, Bertha often said. There was seldom anything in Gilbert's manner to make Christabel think that he remembered a certain evening at the close of her visit to Wells, years ago; that visit of which she had spoken to Bertha as one of the happiest times in her life. Very seldom, if ever, did the Vicar betray, what was indeed the fact, that the question he had then asked Christabel, and which had met with so decided a negative, was yet the question of his life, on which, as far as earthly interests went, his happiness seemed to him increasingly to depend. Something always held

him back, it is true, from asking that question again ; a feeling of dread that if he did, their present pleasant intercourse must cease, or at any rate, that a cloud would be cast over it ; unless indeed she had changed, unless she would answer him differently, unless she would come to him and go through life with him.

But there was always an undefined feeling, which became at times certainty, that Christabel had not changed. Years had gone on, and Gilbert had been away from England ; for after his ordination he had been too feeble in health to take a cure in his own country, but filled a chaplaincy abroad for two or three winters in succession. In all this time, till he was restored to strength and activity again, he had tried to put away the thought of Christabel from his mind, believing that what he had considered so high above other women himself, would have been sought at least, if not won by others. But it did not seem so. The years Christabel had spent in Bristol had been marked by no such event as he had supposed. He came to be Vicar of St. Olave's, and was thrown into daily contact with her, and she appeared to him as she had ever been. Her sweet eyes were as clear and pure in their expression, her voice as musical and true. No shadow had come over her that he could discern. There was no trace of disappointed hopes or blighted love in anything she said or did. If she could not love

him, she had, he thought, loved no one else ; and sometimes he would dwell on this with satisfaction, although it was so difficult to realize it. Bertha, his only confidant, could find no clue to the mystery. No one knew Christabel better than she did. No one but her mother knew her half as well. But Christabel was not prone to talk of her deepest feelings, still less of that hidden love which she had registered for one who was, as he had said, "alone and friendless," and which she kept sacred as something which she would never part with, but take with her to her grave, perhaps unclaimed, perhaps never again to be asked for ; but if it was asked for, to be given fully, freely, and gladly, enriched with the patient hope of waiting years, to be his only, his then and always !

This evening as Gilbert walked by Christabel's side, while the short January day was ebbing to its close, a curious spell seemed over him. The hard-trodden snow on the dirty roads, the little street boys levelling snowballs at each other, with their grimy fingers, the weary dray-horses plodding up from the quay, the old woman with her stall of oranges and chestnuts at the corner of Church Row, vanished. Instead, there was a tinkle of rippling water and a chime of cathedral bells. A scent of lime trees in the fullest bloom, and a breath of summer from distant woodlands brought to the quiet old city nestling under the Mendips' protecting care. What

electric chain of sympathy sent Christabel's thoughts to that same evening? Perhaps Bertha's remark had touched the silent chord; but certain it was she was not surprised, it seemed almost to come naturally to her ear when Gilbert said,—

"Once more, Christabel, once more, after long waiting, let me ask you if there is any hope for me. Will you come to me, and help me on my way; be my comforter; my joy; my wife. I have forborne to say this for many months, but this evening it seems that I must hear from you the definite word. Again, is it Yes or No?"

They were at her door now, and as they stopped there Christabel turned to him. "It must still be No," she said, softly; "I am so sorry you asked me; I thought, I hoped that was all forgotten now."

"Forgotten! there can be no forgetting of a love like mine! Christabel, what is it holds you back? We seem to have the same hopes and aims, the same interests and duties, tell me what it is that holds you back. It is not for me to dwell upon the humble position I can offer you, as the wife of a poor incumbent in a crowded city. I know you too well to think that any sordid worldly motive can affect your decision. I know you too well, Christabel, to think that you are unworthy of your name; nay, I know that in its deepest fullest meaning, it suits you as no other could."

"Please, please, do not say so!" Christabel pleaded; "I cannot bear to hear it; I owe you so much, you have taught me so much; our friendship is so pleasant, why, why do you disturb it by asking for what I cannot give? I cannot give!" she repeated. Her hand was on the bell, and she was about to make it sound, "Do not be angry with me," she said, "do not let my mother miss your visits, let us go on as we were, and forget this."

By the flickering gas-lamp above his head, Christabel saw Gilbert's face; at first the dark cloud over it almost frightened her. She could scarcely recognize the dignified collected parish priest, whose ministry in the church and amongst his people in their own homes was so unwearied in its earnestness, so untiring in its zeal. But the conflict passed, and Gilbert held out his hand. His face was calm again, though very pale as he said, "I will not press my cause any further, Christabel. Doubtless, it is far, far better for me that I should have no added earthly tie to draw me from the work to which I am called of God; doubtless, your decision is for the best. Good-bye, Christabel, and may God for ever bless you."

Then he turned away, and Christabel standing on the steps gazed after his retreating figure, and listened to the sound of his footsteps on the pavement as they grew more and more distant, and then covering her face with her hands,

her tears fell in a shower, and were wet upon her cheek, when at last she pulled the bell, and one of her little brothers rushed to meet her.

"Here is the parcel, Christabel. I did not take it up to mother ; but you have been such a long time, tea is ready, and Susan has made a jolly lot of Heatherington short cakes. Do make haste." The boy looked inquiringly into his sister's face, and, seeing an unwonted sadness there, he forbore to press her farther.

"Let me go upstairs, Harry, and get ready for tea ; tell mother I will not be five minutes."

Soon she had taken her place at the table, now always set for tea in the drawing-room, that the children might be with their mother, and Christabel was her bright self again.

The evening passed in reading, and setting the first stitches in the black dress ; it was not till the house was hushed to stillness, and the clocks were striking midnight from the old belfry towers of the Bristol churches, that Christabel shut the book before her, and prepared to go down to her mother's room to sleep ; for she always slept there now, though she still kept her own room as a sanctum, to which she could retreat for a few minutes' rest and peace. Here she often rallied her energies, and examined into her life with wholesome and unshrinking honesty. Here she girt on her armour, and made ready to fight the good fight against every foe. Here she studied the Bible, which

seemed such a strong link with St. Aubyn, and on rare occasions she read over the letter, which tacitly seemed to bind her to him, though she had never answered it, and he had not followed it by one word in all these years. Once or twice indirect rumours that he was prosperous had reached her from the people about Bideford. But all communication between her family and the Beresfords had ceased for a long time. Mr. Kingscote had freed himself from the meshes of the wily lawyer, and his name was never mentioned. This little square room, with a view only of the tops of chimneys and roofs of houses, was very different to the one under the old elm tree, where so many youthful visions had been dreamed; but here faith and hope had taken deep root in her heart, and the thirsty land had become springs of water, and flowers had sprung up in the desert.

To-night she had questioned her own soul very closely. Something of regret there was that she could not respond to Gilbert's love. Something of a sad, wondering yearning towards the absent one. Perhaps he had forgotten her; perhaps she was holding herself apart for him, when he had long ceased to wish her to do so. But even if it were so, she dared not be untrue to herself; she dared not let any strong affection, or reverence, or liking—and these she knew she did feel for Gilbert—take the place of the love which God has designed to be, as it is, wholly and

entirely different to any other. So much is said and written of marrying and giving in marriage in these days ; so many false notions are afloat, and a certain type of women profess to pride themselves in looking lightly upon the most serious and solemn act of a woman's life. They dress in every varying fashion, talk fast and loud, laugh and jest, speak of the man they think of marrying as "a good old fellow," and say they expect as much "fun" after they are married as before. A "fun" which is so different from the sweet fresh joyousness of youth. A "fun" which cannot be found without the help of pic-nics and croquet parties, archery meetings, and dances; and which cannot exist at all, it seems, in plain and modest dress, but must go hand in hand with frizzled hair, built up and distorted, into every conceivable form, and costumes which are more like the garb of chattering paroquets than of gentle English maidens. Is it possible that a girl who gives herself up to a life like this, from whose lips fall a succession of slang words, who pitches her voice in a high key, or smothers it in foolish giggling at the supposed or real eccentricities of her neighbours, is it possible that this girl can know anything of the deep meaning of the beautiful and holy tie, which has been chosen by a great apostle as a type of that close union existing between the church and her Head!

The rage for great extremes in dress, and

carelessness as to the gentleness and modesty of womanhood, had not come to so great a height in Christabel's day as in ours ; but the same leaven was at work then as now, and there were weak and silly people, aye, and apparently strong and sensible ones too, who seemed, as Gilbert Francis said, to do nothing, and care for nothing but what they ate, drank, and wore.

Amongst such women he had nearly classed Alice Adair, and in some degree he was right. Natural refinement and the early association with her gentle mother had done their part to keep Alice from any approach to vulgar ostentation or *prononcé* style of dress or manners, but her pretty face was an index of the ever restless and never satisfied striving after her own gratification, and the prominent expression there was not a happy one. She had married Mr. Adair at eighteen, with the hardly-won consent of her father, and against the wishes of her mother and Christabel. But to be mistress of Abbot's Court, petted and admired, with everything that she wished for at her command, was a temptation she could not resist. It delivered her from life in Bristol, from the jars arising from small means ; it opened out to her all the pleasant accessories which riches can buy—tours abroad and society at home, admiration and indulgence, and freedom from care and difficulty of every kind. So she thought, and so she decided, and now, after six years had gone by, she comes

into the drawing-room at Adelaide Square, still in her early womanhood, with the cool self-possessed *sang-froid* of one on whom the world has left very perceptible traces. There was no glad return given to Christabel's fervent kiss ; no very great pleasure testified at the sight of her mother, who rose from her chair and advanced with feeble steps and outstretched arms to meet her.

"My darling, it is so long since we have seen you," was Mrs. Kingscote's almost pathetic greeting.

"How are you, dear mamma?" was the response : "better, Christabel says. Well, Willie and Harry, what giants you are growing. My dear boys, please do not touch my travelling bag. Preston is gone to see some old grandmother or aunt who lives in Bedminster, and I sent her on in the fly, and she is to come here about three o'clock. But really, Christabel, we can't drive out to Stoke in one of those horrible Bristol cabs. Is there any place where I can order a decent carriage? It is very awkward not having Foster with me, but he is gone to London with Mr. Adair. I came from Exeter to-day. I dined and slept at Lady Sackville's." Then taking out her watch, she said, "What time is luncheon?"

"Oh, any time you like, dear," Mrs. Kingscote said : "have you any shopping to do? I hoped you would have given this hour or two to me."

"So I will, mamma ; but I must settle about the carriage first. Can one of the boys take a note for me to some place in Clifton ? Miller has a good name there for carriages. I intended to have arranged this before, but Mr. Adair's absence, and being so accustomed to have Foster to settle everything for us, made me forget it, I suppose. May I have a pen and ink, Christabel ?"

Christabel silently opened the case on the writing-table, and moved a chair to it.

"We had better have a pair of horses, I think ; it is seven or eight miles to Stoke Bishop, and dinner is at eight." Then she bent over the paper, and wrote the order with as much earnestness as if it were a matter of life or death. "Now then, boys, here it is ; which of you will take it ?"

"Oh ! we will go together," said Willie : "bother it ! I hope we shall be back in time for dinner."

"You must not go before dinner," said Christabel, decidedly. "There is not time ; it is now half-past twelve, and we dine at one."

"But that will delay us too much," said Alice, petulantly, "and end in Miller's carriages being all engaged."

"We can wait half-an-hour for dinner, Christabel," said Mrs. Kingscote, anxiously, "if Alice does not mind."

"You cannot wait, mother !" but seeing a distressed look on her mother's face, she thought it

better not to contest the point further. Then she followed Gemini from the room with the note, and told them not to run themselves to death up Park Street, for she would see that some tongue and boiled fowl and a mince-pie were kept hot for them.

"I wonder if she will tip us for running her errand," said Harry. "It would be convenient and desirable to earn half-a-crown, eh, Will?"

"Nonsense," said Willie. "I would run anywhere for Alice, though never a step for old Adair."

When Christabel returned from taking a parting look at the luncheon-table, over which she and Susan had spent some thought, Alice said to her sister, "I think I will come and take off my hat now, please!"

Christabel led the way to her mother's room next the drawing-room, where a bright fire was burning, and Christabel's little preparations for her visit lay on the bed.

"Mamma is a good deal better, is she not?" Alice said, arranging her hair by the glass.

"She varies; only a week ago I was very anxious about her; now she has certainly rallied again. Dr. Musgrave thinks her better, or I would not leave her even for a day."

"I think it is a pity you tie yourself so closely," said Alice. "I wish I could come sometimes and relieve you, but I am so much engaged, as you know, and Mr. Adair cannot endure me to

be away from home. He is gone to London now, to look after something for Sir Robert L'Estrange, or he would not have let me come here by myself. But whatever Lena wishes must be done, and this is something about the nurse, who nursed poor little Douglas when he died, who is married, and whom they hear is in great distress. So ridiculous to make a fuss about it, especially as they are in Dresden, and never need be supposed to know anything about it. The nurse's husband has been taken up for forgery, and there is an idea that he is innocent, though how Mr. Adair is to help to prove it, I cannot say. He knows somebody connected with the case, I believe."

"How is Lena; does she write often?"

"Oh, now and then; she is engrossed with her little girl, my granddaughter," she said, with a laugh, "named in my honour, 'Alice.' It is an amusing idea to have a grandchild at, what is it, four-and-twenty. What are you going to wear to-night?"

"That black dress on the bed," said Christabel.

"Why, it is high to the throat, Christabel; and the sleeves are not a right shape; but what will you wear to-morrow at the grand party, you know, for which the Talwysns have been beating up the whole county."

"The same," said Christabel, shortly.

"Nonsense, Christabel, you cannot wear a

gown like that in rooms full of a hundred people."

"It seems to me that that is a very good reason why I should wear it. Lost in a crowd, my individual appearance won't signify."

"You always have a faculty for making yourself look older than you are, but I suppose you must please yourself."

"I suppose I must," said Christabel, an amused smile flitting over her face, which, in spite of everything, was really younger and fresher than Alice's. "I think we had better go back to mother now, she has been looking forward so much to your coming. Do you think you can stay a day or two here on your way from Stoke Bishop?"

"I must hear what Mr. Adair says, he is to join us to-morrow, you know, at Stoke. How are the Francises getting on?"

"Very well; I believe they are coming in to see you this afternoon."

"Oh, are they! I am always frightfully afraid of Gilbert since he has taken to this austere manner of life. But Bertha has infected him with her peculiar notions."

To Christabel's great dissatisfaction her mother insisted on coming downstairs to dine with Alice. It was the first time she had left the drawing-room floor for some weeks, and Christabel dreaded what the consequence might be. Every precaution was, however, taken of wrapping her up,

and guarding her securely from draughts, and she seemed so well pleased to be with her two daughters and the boys, who performed their mission to Clifton in an incredibly short time, she ate so much better a dinner than usual, that before they returned to the drawing-room Christabel's anxiety was relieved.

"It is like old times to have Alice," Mrs. Kingscote said, fondly, for her mother's heart clung to her, almost even more tenaciously now that they were separated so completely from each other. Then the knowledge that much that Katie and Harold and Christabel said of her at times was too true, made her, like all mothers, the more determined to let the veil of love cover her faults, at least from her eyes; or rather, she would fain allow no one discern that she saw them. As most mothers too are wont to do, she called herself to account for Alice's failings. She had allowed her to consider herself superior to the daily drudgery of life, and had not checked, as she might have done, that love of all that was pretty and dainty in dress and externals, which becoming a second nature, had led Alice on step by step to where we find her now. Alice got over the dreaded visit from the Francises very well. They called her husband uncle, and Lena was their first cousin, so she felt herself bound to treat them, not only with courtesy, in which she never failed, but with a show of affection. Christabel went away dur-

ing their visit to superintend her packing, to give parting orders to Susan and Mattie, and to impress upon Gemini that they were left in care of their mother, and that she trusted in their chivalry and honour not to disappoint her, but to be all that good, tender, affectionate little sons should be, to an invalid so precious as she was. And it is only fair to Gemini to say they were not likely to betray the confidence reposed in them.

At last the carriage wheels were heard, and Miller was found to have responded to the order by bringing a yellow chariot and a pair of post-horses, with large-eyed lamps, casting a weird light around, and a seat behind, as well as the box, for man and maid. The man was not forthcoming, and Mrs. Preston looked with some disgust at an outside seat on this bleak January afternoon, heavy with a threatening thaw, and as cheerless and gloomy as could well be conceived. "I shall see you again, dear Alice, when your visit is over, I hope," were amongst Mrs. Kingscote's parting words.

"And you will see me the day after to-morrow, mother; don't hope to get rid of me for longer."

"Oh, do not hasten your return, dearest; if Katie and Harold stay, and you enjoy yourself, do not shorten your visit. Mind you do not let her do so, Alice. And besides, how are you to get back to Bristol?"

"I can always take the good old coach, which

passes the lodge gates every morning on its way to Clifton ; for Sir Richard will let me please myself, I know."

Then the final good-byes were said ; Christabel's last glance from the window of the yellow chariot was fixed upon the dim outline of her mother's figure at the drawing-room window, kissing her hand as a farewell. Then she leaned back by her sister's side, and was very glad to hear her say she was too tired to talk, and intended to get a good nap and wake up fresh for the evening ; for Christabel, in spite of all her resolutions to the contrary, felt very much inclined to let the tears which made her eyes dim roll down her cheeks. But she thought better of it, and tried to divert her mind by watching the dark lines of the ships lying by the quay as they passed, and afterwards the gaily lighted shops, as the horses struggled up Park Street. Then came the crescents and terraces of Clifton, fire-light gleaming on the walls of the rooms where the shutters had not yet been closed, figures of children fluttering across the windows, thrown in strong relief by the ruddy light of the lamps just brought in. Dr. Musgrave's well-known carriage stopping at the house at the corner of York Crescent made her lean forward to look again ; she just caught a glimpse of the doctor opening and closing the door of his brougham. What had he just delivered as his judgment to some anxious

doubting heart? And had he been in earnest, or only building up a shadowy hope, when he had told his questioner, as he had told her a few days before, that her mother was really better. After this the squares and terraces of Clifton were soon left behind, and then came the long straight road across the downs, over which the chill mist lay like a "face cloth," and the light of the carriage lamps made a lurid glare, and startled a tired market gardener wending his way homewards to one of the neighbouring villages; waking him up, as they came across his path like a will-o'-the-wisp, to some sense that an added speed would be better even for his tired pony on such a raw evening.

In a few cottage homes, as the carriage rolled swiftly by, lights, small and twinkling as stars, were seen in the darkness, but for some three or four miles that darkness was complete, and Gemini's remark as they went back to Bertha Francis and their mother in the drawing-room, was peculiarly appropriate.

"Fancy Alice making a fuss about the sort of carriage in which she was to drive over to Stoke! It is almost dark now, and by the time they get there it will be pitch dark. No one will be able to see whether the carriage is yellow or green; or whether it is a Bristol fly or one of Miller's coaches which he uses for smart weddings!"

"Were we not quick running up to Clifton, Miss Francis? We did not leave this house till

twenty minutes past twelve, and got back at ten minutes past one?"

"You must have hired Pegasus for the occasion, I should think," said Bertha. "I am glad you did not miss your dinner."

"She did not tip us after all, Willie."

"No, indeed," said Willie; "and I don't want to be paid by my sister for running her errands, as I told you before."

"If you did, you would not be likely to get it; so it is all right. Neither Alice nor old Adair ever gave us anything worth twopence in their lives, except that memorable book with the pictures of birds, which belonged to Cousin Nan in her youth."

"Hush, my dear boys, hush!" said Mrs. King-scote. "I do not like to hear you talking of your sister in that way, or of Mr. Adair either."

A warning look from Bertha stopped a retort from Harry, and the subject of Alice and the carriage was finally dismissed.

CHAPTER X.

PICTURES FROM LIFE.

“Should I change my allegiance for rancour,
If Fortune changes her side?
Or should I, like a vessel at anchor,
Turn with the turn of the tide?”

JEAN INGELow.

DARK indeed was the night, not only on Clifton Downs, and in the roads and lanes leading to Stoke, but out at sea, where a thick mist, soon to gather into a dense fog, had been creeping over the water since sundown. In a larger and more northern city than Bristol the concourse of busy people was, on this January evening, hurrying to and fro. Every one seemed bent on urgent business, but probably if you had stopped three or four in succession, you would only have heard in answer to your question as to what was filling them with such eager interest and excitement, that West Indian sugar had risen and cotton fallen; that another great timber merchant had failed; or that a man living to-night in a spacious house with gilded mirrors and soft carpets, would

probably by sunset to-morrow be unable to call any place home, and have nothing in the world belonging to him but his wife, and children, and his debts ! There is ever at Liverpool a succession of incoming and outgoing ships. Perhaps at no port are so many farewells spoken, or greetings interchanged. So many go out from thence in search of bread ; so many on business ; so many on pleasure ; the latter increasing rapidly in these times, when a passage of a few days is long enough to take us across the wide rolling Atlantic, and transplant us to the shores of a new world. This dark night was no exception to the rule ; and amongst a number of other vessels a steamer, the " *Filomena*," from Jamaica, had come into dock. Before twilight waned she had been safely piloted there, through fog and mist, and now lay quietly at rest ; while those she had borne to England with speed and comfort, were in all the bustle of preparation for disembarkation. A few of the passengers were going to remain on board for the night ; but others were eagerly getting ready, to be in time to reach certain trains which would convey them to their destinations in various parts of England. One erect figure was noticeable among them ; a man with a certain proud carriage of the head, which was unmistakable, and an accent in his voice which proclaimed him a gentleman in a mixed crowd, as well as the calm manner in which he gave his directions about his luggage,

and took leave of some persons standing by, with whom he had made acquaintance on the voyage.

"Good evening, Mr. Kingscote, and good-bye," said one busy man, who had been to Jamaica on a business expedition for his employers, and who therefore looked upon Mr. Kingscote in the light of an equal. "Good evening, Mr. Kingscote ; a 'appy return to you to your own 'ome, and may all our little transactions be as prosperous as this, say I. I wish you would have come to the hotel though, and had a parting glass."

"Thank you, no ; I must hasten to catch the nine o'clock express, as it is—good-bye."

He turned quickly away from the deck, descended the two or three steps to the plank laid across to the landing-stage. The gas gave a tolerable light. Others had stepped across before him, others would safely follow him, how it was no one could tell, but Mr. Kingscote missed his footing at the last, and a dull heavy splash in the dark strip of water between the hull of the steamer and the landing-stage, was followed by a cry, "A man in the water ! ropes ; a boat ; quick, there ; look alive !" In another moment a man who had been watching Mr. Kingscote's departure, and was standing next to the stout traveller who had last spoken to him, had taken off his coat, and while the cry of the spectators was yet on their lips, he had plunged into the

water. "Two drowned instead of one!" they said. Then a number of heads peered down from the side of the ship and from the landing-stage. "Two instead of one; he has sunk; they have both sunk. Who was it? Such a leap in the dark! Who was it?" There was a scuffle of feet, as the ropes were let down from the side of the ship, and the boat lowered. But in all these minutes no sound came from the murky depth beneath; both men seemed to have vanished. As the excitement grew greater, and the fear and nameless terror all people feel, when they are suddenly brought face to face with a danger which may be death, had stilled the voices of the crowd gathering fast on one side, and of the eager group collected on the other, there came the sound of a voice, a good way down, it seemed, for the strong current of the great Mersey was ebbing fast, "A boat here! He is saved!" Then a pause, and then the voice again, "Quick! he is insensible!" Such clear ringing tones they were, and seemed to cleave through the dark heavy air, like the voice which fell from the lips of the earnest seeker after purer heights, that mystical yet most real hero, whose motto has been our watchword since our youth — "Excelsior;" so rang out the true manly voice once more, "Help here!" Deep silence—the silence of suspense—followed; only the lapping of the disturbed water against the steep sides of the ship, only the low faint murmur of the crowd on the opposite

side. At last there was a cry from the boat, it was the mate's voice this time, "It's all right here ; they are both hauled in." Soon the boat was alongside of the steamer, and one insensible dripping figure swung up on deck by the practised hands of the crews, while the other helped himself up, and in answer to inquiries poured on him by the passengers and crew, declared he was all right, and refused the glass of grog which the captain pressed on him. "Better take it, Mr. St. Aubyn, that was a cold plunge on a night like this."

"Aye, and a brave one too," said the mate ; "you make me ashamed of myself, you a landsman to be too quick for a whole ship's crew ; but you must swallow the captain's grog," said the mate authoritatively, "and get some dry clothes out of your luggage ; you must, I say !" And the mate saw that the hand which at last took the glass of spirits and raised it to his lips was trembling violently.

Meantime a little fussy surgeon, one of the passengers, was busying himself with Mr. Kingscote. "He must be taken to an hotel, and you, young man, who so nobly risked your life for his, ought to accompany him ; a good bed and fire will do much for you both." Ah ! that is right," exclaimed the surgeon ; "he is coming round ;" but though this was true, and Mr. Kingscote opened his eyes, the coming round was a slow process ; and the removal had

been effected to the nearest hotel, and Mr. Kingscote was installed in bed there, before he wholly realized his position. His first words were to inquire the name of the man who saved him.

"Mr. St. Aubyn, the passenger who has kept so much to himself during our passage," was the surgeon's prompt answer. "A fine tall man he is ; they say he began life on a cotton plantation in Brazil, and showed so much knowledge of what he was about that, in a year or two, he sold the plantation to his advantage, to a man who has large estates in Jamaica. He has now a pretty bit of a place there ; is making money fast, and is only returning to England for a few months. That is what I gather about him, sir," said the doctor, standing with his back to the fire, and warming his hands comfortably. "Now you will do perfectly well, Mr. Kingscote, if you remain quiet for a few hours ; no doubt you will be able to pursue your journey to-morrow."

"Mr. Onslow," said Mr. Kingscote, from the bed, "I must see this Mr. St. Aubyn before I go to sleep. He saved my life, and I cannot rest till I have acknowledged the debt I owe him. Ask him to be so good as to come here."

"Well, really, my dear sir, I believe Mr. St. Aubyn has turned into his hammock again, as the sailors say. I saw him go away with the mate as we left the vessel, evidently for the purpose of changing his wet clothes, and going to

bed. In the morning I will summon him ; but it is—bless me !” said Mr. Onslow, referring to his watch ; “ it is nearly eleven o’clock. I think we had better settle ourselves for the night. I have made my arrangements to be at your service if you require me ; and have decided to sleep in the next room. Really,” he added, feeling Mr. Kingscote’s hands, “ your skin is quite in a nice state of perspiration, and the pulse very good. I congratulate you, my dear sir ; for at your age or mine, the shock of a sudden plunge into cold water is no joke. Mr. Kingscote, I can’t imagine how you missed your footing.”

“ Neither can I,” was the reply, “ but I do not know that it is worth going over that now. Since I cannot see Mr. St. Aubyn to-night, I must resign myself to sleep, I think. Thank you, sir, for your attention, for which you must allow me to remunerate you to-morrow.”

“ Oh, we will not discuss that now,” said Mr. Onslow, grandly, though he instantly settled in his own mind what fee he should expect ; and after bustling about for another minute or so, he left Mr. Kingscote to himself. Then he strolled down to the coffee-room before he went to bed anxious to find an audience to whom he could relate the story of Mr. Kingscote’s accident, and the courageous effort which a fellow-passenger had made to save him.

Mr. Kingscote did not find sleep so easy to achieve ; he was restless, and haunted with a

strange sense that his deliverer's face was not unknown to him. The name too, the name was so familiar to him, connected with the days of youth, so familiar and so dear.

It was difficult to recognize in the sun-burnt stalwart man of seven or eight-and-twenty, the slender boy whom Mr. Kingscote had often seen amongst his children at Heatherington, and with whom Harold had always pleaded to be allowed to go upon excursions in search of treasures, by land and sea. The deep blue eyes, with their long dark fringes, were alone familiar to Mr. Kingscote ; but these only recalled a buried vision of youth, and were not associated with St. Aubyn Beresford. The silky chestnut beard and moustache hiding the mouth and chin, rendered the recognition less probable ; and throughout their short passage St. Aubyn had kept aloof from Mr. Kingscote, waiting for what should be the best time to introduce himself to him, and tell him the object of his return. After much tossing and turning Mr. Kingscote fell into an uneasy slumber ; and at last started, in the morning, to find the loquacious surgeon standing by him, and another figure, too—that of St. Aubyn Beresford.

Immediately Mr. Kingscote held out his hand. "Thank you," he said, earnestly, "thank you, Mr. St. Aubyn, for your brave act last night. But for your help the waters would have closed over me, and I should have seen my wife and children

no more. Thank you from my heart, and may God reward you as you deserve."

"You have little to thank me for," was the reply; "I can swim, and the risk was slight; but," taking the offered hand, "before we say any more, let me remind you, Mr. Kingscote, that you know me—my name is St. Aubyn Beresford."

"Beresford!" Mr. Kingscote repeated, slowly and wonderingly; "Beresford—ah, yes! I see it now. Did you know who I was when you took that leap in the dark?"

St. Aubyn smiled. "Indeed I did. I would have tried to save any one whom I had seen fall as you did, but I had a double reason for doing my best to save you. I have longed throughout the voyage to tell you who I was, but waited till the right moment should come. I knew, alas! my name must wake disagreeable memories, and I almost shrank from introducing myself, and entering upon the object of my voyage to England."

Mr. Kingscote turned away his head, with a scarcely perceptible movement, and St. Aubyn saw it.

"Where are you going to-day?" Mr. Kingscote asked.

"To Exeter, passing Bristol on the way. I need not stay there now I have seen you. When we are alone I will explain myself more fully."

Mr. Onslow, who delighted in a mystery, and

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caught enough of this conversation to know that there was one in this case, now came near.

"I should recommend you to keep quiet for a few hours, Mr. Kingscote, and not to leave Liverpool till the afternoon. You and this gentleman can travel together, and cement your friendship in the railway carriage. In the meantime, my dear sir, having fulfilled my promise of bringing Mr.—Mr. St. Aubyn Beresford is it? early this morning, I must now beg him to retire. I have ordered a cup of good coffee to be brought you, and when you have taken it, I should recommend a couple of hours' repose before starting. If Mr. St. Aubyn—he must pardon me for using the *nom de voyage*," interpolated the little man, chuckling with delight at his own speech—"if Mr. St. Aubyn is going to Exeter, it will be a desirable thing for you to travel in company. I shall be compelled to take a north train about one o'clock; but I hope to see you dressed, and pretty much yourself, Mr. Kingscote, before I finally take my leave of you. Now Mr. St. Aubyn had better bid you adieu. *Au revoir*. I will look in on you about twelve."

Mr. Kingscote was considerably relieved to find that the little doctor did not intend to attach himself longer to his side. He was of a loquacious turn, which was peculiarly distasteful to Mr. Kingscote; but as he and St. Aubyn were leaving the room he said, with something of his old haughty manner, "Mr. St. Aubyn, it

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will perhaps suit you to meet me at the station about one o'clock, and, if you please, we may then perform our journey as far as Bristol together."

St. Aubyn bowed, and followed Mr. Onslow from the room. In vain the worthy disciple of Esculapius sounded St. Aubyn's depths, and tried to extract from him his reasons for changing his name while on board the "Filomena."

"I beg your pardon," was St. Aubyn's cool answer, "I did not change my name."

"Well, well; substitute your first for your second; is that it? Curious that you knew Mr. Kingscote, and he did not know you. Very strange too that you should save his life."

"Not too strange to be true," was St. Aubyn's reply; and then he began to talk of something so widely apart from the "Filomena" and the passage she had just made from the West Indies, that even Mr. Onslow could not pursue his questioning further.

"Now, Mr. Beresford," said Mr. Kingscote, when the first few miles of their journey had been gone over in silence, "now, Mr. Beresford, I must beg you to accept my thanks once more for your heroic act last evening, and ask you if I can do anything to serve you?"

"My business in England was chiefly to see you, Mr. Kingscote," said St. Aubyn, with some difficulty. "Do not speak again of any debt

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you owe me for a very poor service. For many years the knowledge that you have suffered from those who bear my name has weighed upon me. I wished to see you, to tell you that I have prospered in life thus far; and that I am able to pay back some portion at least of what you lost through my father's fault."

Mr. Kingscote waved his hand impatiently. "I am sorry, Mr. Beresford, that you should have undertaken this voyage for such a purpose. I am glad to say I too have prospered, since a succession of losses rendered my removal from Heatherington prudent. There is no need for you to think of paying back the sum for which I was responsible for your father many years ago. The dead past has buried its dead. Unless my son, who is my heir, is of a different opinion, I must decline to accept what is undoubtedly a very honourable proposal."

St. Aubyn felt chilled and disheartened. Mr. Kingscote's manner was so precisely that of long ago. Time had not softened him. He was still the representative of an old family, and St. Aubyn the nephew of a Bideford attorney!

"You said just now that you were willing to serve me," he rejoined, "you cannot oblige me more than by allowing me to place the money set apart for that purpose in your hands."

"I could not think of it," Mr. Kingscote still persisted, but he added, in a more genial tone, "do not mistake me. I appreciate your high

sense of honour, and in any other way I shall be only too glad to show my gratitude for your brave effort to save my life last evening. Is there nothing I can do?"

St. Aubyn was silent.

"You said that an interview with me was one reason for your return to England—had you any other?"

"Yes; I believe my father is in great poverty. I must try to find him; he is now in England. I have traced him so far. His second wife and two of the children died three years ago; one of my brothers, the eldest, has long been with me; and I have left him now in Jamaica, till I decide my future."

"Do you not intend to return there?"

"I cannot tell," he answered, and his eyes were fixed on Mr. Kingscote with a sad pathetic earnestness which struck him.

"Are you in bad health?" he asked, almost involuntarily.

"No," he said, with a smile; "I suppose I can scarcely say that; but I am not very strong, nevertheless."

"Then you must have run a double risk last night; I hope you will not suffer from it. Give me your hand again, St. Aubyn. God bless you."

After this, Mr. Kingscote, who was stiff and tired, and shaken by his accident more than he cared to confess, lay back in the carriage and fell asleep. Once St. Aubyn took the thick

travelling-rug which had slipped off, and replaced it with a kindly, gentle touch. Then he too resigned himself to his thoughts, in his own corner of the carriage, and the train moved swiftly on towards the smoky city of the west.

"You must come home with me, St. Aubyn," Mr. Kingscote said, when, on their arrival at Bristol, they were waiting outside the station, while the tickets were being taken.

"I think not," was St. Aubyn's reply, "but I hope I shall hear of you soon, and that when you have consulted your son, you will reward my long years of labour by accepting what I offer."

St. Aubyn gathered up Mr. Kingscote's possessions, and helped him to secure his luggage on the platform. When he saw how tremulous and shaken he seemed, he altered his intentions, and letting the train go on without him to Exeter, called a fly for Mr. Kingscote, and said he would see him home.

"I must go to my office on the quay first," said Mr. Kingscote; "there are several things I want to communicate to the clerks at once, and leave some papers there."

"Do you think you are fit for it to-night?" St. Aubyn asked.

"Whether I am or not, it must be done," was the reply. "I believe I have got cold; I am shivering so that I can hardly stand. I must be careful not to alarm Emily. Mrs. Kingscote is

a great invalid, but my daughter will prepare her for my coming; she is never able to bear any sudden excitement."

St. Aubyn made no rejoinder to this, and directed his energies to get his own luggage safely deposited, till he should return and take it on with him to Exeter, and then he guided Mr. Kingscote safely to a fly, through the throng of omnibus drivers, porters, and passengers, who were clamouring at the door of the station, this wet raw evening.

The great entertainment at Stoke, of which the local papers would give a complimentary notice the next day, did not differ from others of the same kind, which are given in large houses in the country every winter. Except indeed, in those shades of variety, which do not lie on the surface, but nevertheless show themselves to keen observers, and thus present the diversity which gives society its charm for those who can find enjoyment in being one of a gay crowd, more as a spectator, than anything else.

It was in this character, perhaps, that Christabel Kingscote moved about Sir Richard Talwyn's beautiful rooms. She had no anxieties about her dress or her appearance, nor was she uneasy about the amount of attention she received. Alice was oppressed with a scarcely defined vexation about her hair, which Preston had tried to arrange in a new fashion, but which

did not suit her particular type of face. She was disappointed, too, because the great lady of the evening, a Marchioness, whom people in the neighbourhood delighted to honour, responded to her greeting with a salutation so cold that it was scarcely worthy of the name, though the next moment Alice saw her kindling into what seemed a rapturous conversation with a man of some literary fame, who was on a pedestal not too lofty for the Marchioness to patronize, though he contrived to let her feel that he did her great honour by allowing her to claim a friendship with him. Poor Lady Talwyn was a simple-hearted woman, whose vulgar pleasure in her own success in life was too open to be irritating. She was kindly and good-natured, and Christabel looked on her as a friend. First came the concert, and then the acting of two or three elaborate charades, and a tableau, in which Sir Richard's two unmarried daughters, and Harold, and Katie Kingscote took a prominent part. Lady Talwyn's praise was as loud as any one's.

"Yes, they do it well, don't they? my girls have always had a turn for acting; and Mrs. Lambert, that's my eldest daughter, is cleverer than either Emma or Delia, isn't she, Richard?"

Sir Richard, who was but little altered since the day we first saw him at St. Ogg's Hill, nodded his head. "Yes," he said, gently, "but I think we have to thank Katie and Harold Kingscote

for the success of the charade ; we must not sound our own children's trumpets too loudly, Hester."

For all this time the awful Marchioness was listening with a cold supercilious expression on her face, which was not lost on Sir Richard, though entirely on Lady Talwyn. Christabel, who was standing near, admired the patience with which her uncle invariably answered his wife, and showed no sign of being disconcerted by her little departures from good manners.

"Who are the Kingscotes? That young man with the dark hair knows something of what he is about," said the literary character, with a grand air of being an authority ; "and the girl played very well—very fairly. Are they Clifton people?" he inquired.

Lady Westonville put her glass in her eye. "You must not ask me," she said, "I know none of the people about here ; perhaps you can tell us," she said, addressing Christabel, for the host and hostess had moved away. "Who is the man who acted in the last scene? does he live in Clifton?"

"He lives in Bristol," said Christabel, bravely ; "he is my brother, Harold Kingscote."

Lady Westonville concentrated her stare on Christabel for a few moments. She had noticed her, as many other people had, in her black gauze dress, through which her white shoulders gleamed, and the only ornament on her well-shaped head

the black velvet band with gold stars, which bound back her shining hair. Amidst the pink and blue and green toilettes around her, and the gardens of flowers which encumbered the heads of most of the ladies, old and young, Christabel was unconsciously conspicuous. Her sweet face, with the serene smile, which was so unlike the mask too often worn in the world, attracted many eyes; and her voice, when it was heard, was so low and true in its tones, so different to the loud rattle of some and the affected drawl of others. Before Lady Westonville could recover from the surprise of Christabel's answer to her question, Katie came towards them on her brother's arm, both threading their way through the crowd, anxious to reach their sister. It was evident her approbation was as eagerly sought now as when they were children.

"How did I get through it, Christabel," asked Katie, eagerly; "it was so nice to know you were here, and looking and listening."

"Yes!" said Harold, "it ensured one note of applause for us, did it not, Katie? so that was satisfactory. This room is frightfully hot, the people are all drifting off to supper; let us go and find a cool corner and an ice. They are going to dance soon in the further drawing-room."

Harold gave an arm to each of his sisters and they went off together. The cool corner was discovered, and Christabel found it very pleasant to talk over many things with Harold and Katie.

"We have been here a fortnight, and Lady Talwyn wants us to stay over next week," said Katie, "but if you will take my place, Christabel, I will go home to mother to-morrow."

"I should be a poor substitute for you, Katie, as I cannot play or make myself so generally agreeable. I know it does not spoil you for home, so I think you had better stay."

"I shall take you back to-morrow, if you are really bent upon it, Christabel," said Harold, "but I suppose I must return here; I have promised to go with the Talwyns to Fordingham on Thursday."

"What a thing it is to be a man in so much request," said Christabel, playfully. "But, Harold, have you been doing your duty to Mr. Adair? he looks rather cloudy to-night."

"Does he? pompous old fellow; he is not made so much of as he expected, I suppose, and is put out, I dare say, because Alice does not look her best, which is certainly true. There is something wrong with her hair, and her gown is too old for her. By-the-by, now we are on the subject of dress, how well you look, Christabel."

"I am glad you are satisfied, dear, I dare say I do very well for my mature years."

"And mother is really better, Christabel?" Harold asked.

"Yes; that is to say, she has had some very good nights, and her cough is much less. I am longing to get back to her," she added, with a

sigh, "though I am glad I came to see you both ; and Sir Richard is so kind, and speaks so warmly of our father's service to him."

The sound of distant music, and people passing through the room to the dancing, roused Harold to a sense of his duty, and he left his sisters to find his partner for the first quadrille.

"Harold is such a favourite," said Katie, proudly, "and everybody likes him."

"And you, Katie, have you been happy here?"

"Oh, yes ; I have enjoyed it all immensely, and I have tried to remember all you said, Christabel, and I don't think I have been silly this time. It is all very charming and nice here, and it must be very pleasant to be rich, but after all, I am quite as happy at home, and I am quite ready to begin teaching in the Vicar's night school again. Oh ! Christabel, when I saw Alice and Mr. Adair meet each other so coldly to-day, after a separation, I did hope I should never get to love grand things, and ease, and luxury too well. Alice would never have married an old man if it had not been for that !"

"Do not let us judge poor Alice," said her sister ; "Mr. Adair, too, has been to London on an errand of kindness."

"Because Sir Robert L'Estrange asked him, and because——"

"Hush, Katie, do not impute motives which perhaps do not exist. I had that habit once, and perhaps never judged any people more

unjustly than the Talwyns. They have been true friends to us, and when our father first said he would ask Sir Richard to exert himself for us, I was ready to resent the idea."

The dance music sounded from afar, groups of people passed and repassed the sisters, as they sat together. At last Harold brought a friend of his to introduce him to Katie, and she was led away to dance.

"I can find you a partner too, Christabel," he said, returning for a moment, "if you like—will you come?"

"No, thanks, dear Harold, I shall sit here for half-an-hour longer, and watch every one, and then betake myself to the old ladies again; there is plenty of amusement for me."

He smiled and nodded, and left her, she watching his retreating figure with loving eyes of sisterly admiration. Then when left to herself she fell into a train of thought which was grave and almost sad. Here was the surface of life, and over it the glad, and careless, and the young, were floating with gay delight. But Christabel knew now, or rather had realized, that happiness did not rest chiefly, if at all, in scenes like this. Life with its deeper meaning, life with all its great joys and strong emotions, does not consist in the abundance of the things which we possess. There is ever a stretching onward to something unseen, a yearning which earthly pleasures will not fill, a sense of need, a craving

for something firm and steadfast in the midst of all that is visionary and unstable, and like a dream when one awaketh ! We want an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, that will not fail, that shall be ours when the waters of life are calm and bright, giving a sense of possession and a treasure in the heavens that fadeth not. We want an anchor, which when storms rage furiously and there is tumult and dismay, and our human hearts fail and faint within us, is ours, that we *know* to be ours ; even the blessed Hope "for which the whole church looketh," a Hope which can never make us ashamed ! There had been days and years when this Hope was unknown to Christabel ; unconsciously almost to herself she had reached out to it, and never were feeble hands stretched forth to that Great Anchor in vain. Never a heart that strives and struggles to grasp it, and is sent adrift to face the billows with no stay and no succour. And as with Christabel, so with many another soul. Our Guide leads us by paths we know not ; by no sudden change, by no shock of earthquake, or flames of fire, but by the still small voice which whispers its divine message, and lures us on, "I am thy Hope and thy Salvation ;" and very true it is that the young and fresh who rest on this Anchor are ever among the brightest and the most glad at heart of all. It is, as Christabel said to Bertha Francis, "This Hope keeps other hopes green."

CHAPTER XI.

REST.

"Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward unto souls afar;
Along the psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if that any is
For gift or grace surpassing this :
He giveth his beloved sleep."

E. B. BROWNING.

"CHRISTABEL, will you allow me to take you in to supper?" It was Mr. Adair's cold, precise voice which roused her at last from her thoughts. "You have been sitting here alone some time. I should have come to you before, but I really could not get away from Lady Westonville. I hope you have not felt neglected. Now, on occasions of this kind, in my house, I take care—I flatter myself I take care—that every guest has the proper attention due from a host. But then, of course, we do not expect everything here."

Self-laudatory and self-complacent as ever, Mr. Adair led Christabel away towards the

spacious dining-room ; she was smiling and amused with her brother-in-law's condescending remembrance of her existence ; but the amusement turned the next moment into vexation and sorrow for her sister, as Mr. Adair paused on his way by the sofa on which his wife sat, and, in a voice audible to two or three people near, said, "Alice, I beg you will not dance again this evening. You are over-heated now, and I cannot allow it."

Alice's lip turned scornfully, but she only answered, "Very well ;" and that was all.

"This way, I think," Mr. Adair said, "across the hall, it will lead us to the dining-room. That arrangement of flowers might be improved ; it is heavy, decidedly heavy."

But Christabel did not answer ; she saw Sir Richard Talwyn standing by one of the pillars which formed a sort of corridor at the end of the hall, talking earnestly to some one, whose figure was concealed by a high stand of flowering plants. What was it that made her sure Sir Richard sought her as he turned away, and went quickly across the hall with an eager hurried gesture ? What made her heart sink within her, with the almost certainty of evil tidings ? As waters in a well sink before an earthquake's shock, so her heart seemed to stop beating in the moment of suspense which followed, when Sir Richard, catching sight of her, came towards her. "Christabel, my dear, I am looking for you."

"What is it?" she said, taking her hand from Mr. Adair's arm, and instinctively drawing near Sir Richard.

"My dear—my dear child, you are wanted at home."

"My mother!" Christabel exclaimed, her pale lips almost refusing the utterance even of that one word.

"Yes; she has had a bad attack this evening of faintness and breathlessness. She had rallied to some extent, when, unexpectedly, your father came home, and the excitement was too much for her. Yes, yes, my dear, you shall go. Harold and Katie also, if you like. But, my dear, Francis is here; he has come out in a fly from Bristol; he will return at once with you, if you please."

"Oh yes, yes, it will take some time to find Harold and Katie, they can follow; I must go to her at once." By this time Gilbert had come up to her. "Will you take me now, at once, I cannot wait? Let Harold and Katie follow, and Alice. Is there danger? I wish to know the truth," she said, looking into Gilbert's face.

He answered honestly, "Yes, I think there is."

Two or three minutes more, while the sound of the music floated to her ear, while the hum of gay voices seemed to jar painfully upon her soul, and then she was wrapped in cloaks, for which a servant had been hastily sent, and was conscious of nothing except a restless desire,

like that of a dream, to get into the fly and go to her mother.

"You shall have the carriage, Christabel," said Sir Richard, "if you will wait; the worst of it is, there may be some delay, all the servants are so occupied to-night. Have you two horses?" he asked of Gilbert.

"Yes, such as they are," he replied, but we shall, no doubt, get back more quickly than I came. Still, Miss Kingscote, had you not better accept Sir Richard's offer?"

"Oh no, no! I am ready, quite ready; send Katie and Harold, and Alice, if Mr. Adair will let her come; but do let us go now."

"They had better come as soon as possible," said Gilbert; and Christabel, catching the words, interpreted the meaning. She turned to Mr. Adair, "Pray, please, let Alice come!" and then she stepped out into the fly; and Gilbert taking his seat opposite her, they rumbled off.

"How was it?" she asked, after a few moments' silence.

"She was faint after tea; Bertha was with her. Dr. Musgrave saw her, and she had rallied and was conscious again. As they were helping her to her room your father arrived, she heard his voice in the hall below, and saw him ascending the stairs slowly and feebly; she thought something was wrong, we imagine, and fell back again insensible."

"Is anything wrong with my father?"

"I trust not ; he had an accident last evening, by falling into the water at Liverpool, but it is nothing serious."

"Thank God !" Christabel whispered.

"The Filomena had a very quick passage, and she came in, five days before she was due. I started almost directly after your father's arrival, but he had some one with him, whose name I did not hear, but who, I understood him to say, had saved his life. There was a great deal of excitement and distress, so that I really cannot tell you more precise particulars. You were very much wanted, and I felt the best thing I could do was to come for you at once."

"Oh that I had never gone ! Oh that I had never, never left her !"

"Do not say so," Gilbert said, firmly, "you did it for the best, and she was anxious you should go. There is nothing to reproach yourself with. Nothing could have warded off the attack. Dr. Musgrave says he has feared it for many months."

Gilbert spoke so calmly and decidedly that Christabel felt herself quieting down under his influence. He seemed to understand her wishes, and except to answer her questions did not talk during the long cheerless drive. At last the lights of Clifton came in sight ; then they descended the steep hill of Park Street, passed the river and the dark mysterious forms of the shipping, and stopped at last at Adelaide

Square. Only one day had passed since Christabel had driven away from the door with Alice, and now it seemed as if years almost had gone by since then. But now that she was at home, and within reach of her mother, with the possibility of being of use to her, all her self-possession returned ; nor had she failed to seek help and courage for what lay before her ; and both were given. She resigned her wraps into the hands of her little brothers, who met her with pale anxious faces, and stooping down she kissed them both ; Harry whispering as she did so, "Mother is better again ; she is talking to papa."

"I must go to her," she said, "dear boys. Harold and Katie will soon be here. Sir Richard was going to send them as soon as the carriage was ready."

Then Christabel passed upstairs, pausing at the open drawing-room door one moment on her way. She saw with a pang her mother's empty chair, the little invalid table pushed aside, and the tea standing as it had been left hours before. A piece of knitting, which Christabel had seen last in her mother's hand, lay on the floor. She advanced to pick it up and tenderly pressed it to her lips, when she became conscious that she was not alone. St. Aubyn Beresford was looking at her with an earnest appeal in his eyes which she never forgot. She held out her hand, and he took it in his, but only for a moment. As Gilbert Francis fol-

lowed Christabel into the room he passed out, turning once more to look at Christabel, a long sad farewell gaze, which made her exclaim, "St. Aubyn!" But in another moment he had gone downstairs and left the house.

"Who is it? Do you know him?" Gilbert asked. "It was he who saved your father's life."

"Do I know him!" Christabel repeated. "Do I know him! it is St. Aubyn Beresford."

Christabel did not understand what made Gilbert hastily follow St. Aubyn, and failing to overtake him before he left the house, open and shut the hall door after him and go out into the street. She did not know, and she hardly heeded it. She turned to the well-known door of her mother's room, scarcely able to control herself, only feeling that she must not give way, and that every one was looking to her for help. Christabel went softly into the room at last; so softly that her father, who was sitting by the bed, his head buried in his hands, did not look up; Bertha Francis and Susan were on the other side of the room: and for a moment no one spoke. Mrs. Kingscote lay very still with closed eyes; sweet and peaceful as was the expression of her face, there was upon it the unmistakable change which we can never see and fail to recognize. It was with a throb of pain, such as those only can understand who love as Christabel loved her mother, that she had to acknowledge to herself that this illness was unto death.

"Father, dear father!"

Mr. Kingscote started at the sound of her voice, and opening his arms folded her close.

The movement roused Mrs. Kingscote; she looked up, and said, "Ah, darling! dear Christabel. I was afraid she would not come back." Then she wandered and talked indistinctly of Heatherington, saying the sound of the sea did not disturb her; she liked it, it was such sweet music. In her wandering she was young again, calling all her children by their names; once she said that Christabel looked prettiest on the white pony, and how proud her father was of her. "He loves her so much—he loves us all so much. Oh! Philip; dear Philip; how happy we are! Only let us love God more; let us teach the children, especially little Harold, to love Him. For there is no hope, no hope, but the hope that rests in Him." So it went on through the night. As day dawned all her children were with her, and she knew them, though often speaking to them as if the sun dial had gone back some degrees, and they were all little ones playing around her in the Heatherington gardens once more. Her husband never left her, but sat by her hour after hour, with a look of wan sorrow on his face, which went to Christabel's heart. It seemed as if time had gone back for him too! It was not the weary, way-worn woman lying before him, often gazing at him with such pathetic eyes, in which the full light of recognition had faded; but it was his

Emily of other days—bright, and glad, and gay—springing over the grass at Heatherington to greet him with a kiss; not as, alas! had too often been the case in later years, anxious and doubtful as to the mood in which she might find him, distrusting her power to please him, shrinking from his harsh words, and yet in her secret soul ever saying to herself that deep under the crust which had hardened over it the love for her was still there—in her husband's heart. And she was right, between his first and second voyages to the West Indies that love had reasserted its power; and now, as Mr. Kingscote sat by his dying wife, it rose up with a vehemence of sad and passionate regret, which was almost more than he could bear.

One day and night passed, and another morning dawned, and again the short winter day closed in, and Mrs. Kingscote still lay with intervals of consciousness as when Christabel had first returned to her. Katie and Harold and poor Gemini, to whom such grief was new, were persuaded by Bertha to go to bed, with the promise that she would call them if there were any change. Alice was in her husband's keeping, and only allowed to come to her mother now and then. It was hopeless to try to remove Christabel or her father from the room. But Mr. Kingscote lay down on the sofa, and Bertha sat with Christabel in her watch. Hers was the silent ministry of love, that is so different from the fussy ob-

trusive attentions which jar upon us in our sorrow or our pain, and often make the stricken heart say, "I would rather be alone." Hour after hour passed on, and there was no sound but Mr. Kingscote's heavy breathing as he lay exhausted on the sofa, and his wife's gentle respirations, as life ebbed slowly away, for Dr. Musgrave had said she was sinking, and they knew it. They roused her now and then to take what was ordered, but it became more and more difficult to do this—the cough and the pain, which had at first been very severe in her side, were gone, and now it was only the slow failing of the springs of life. Gilbert Francis had been with her several times in the course of that day, and she had listened to what he read, and again and again responded gently to his prayers. There had been a long interval of silence, when Christabel heard her name spoken so clearly and distinctly it made her start.

"Christabel, we have been so happy with each other; I thank you for all you have been to me, darling; comfort your father, and keep them all together by your love."

"Yes, dearest mother, I will do my best."

"I thought," her mother continued, "I saw St. Aubyn Beresford; but I suppose it was fancy. I have seen so many people since I have been ill, or fancied I saw them."

"St. Aubyn was here," Christabel said, with a great effort.

"Did you see him? did you speak to him?"

"Yes, mother, I saw him, but only for a moment; he is gone, and I have not seen him again."

"Gone!" Mrs. Kingscote looked as if she wished to say more; to ask another question, but the power failed. That was the last earthly thought which troubled her; a few minutes later she uttered her husband's name, and then, with a bright smile, One which was music in her ear. Her voice roused Mr. Kingscote at once. Bertha saw the end was near, and went to call the others, as she had promised; while Mr. Kingscote knelt down by his wife. Before Bertha had returned, before those she summoned could reach the room, the last low sigh was breathed, and the wife and mother was at rest.

Then there came over them all that terrible helpless sense of loss, which seems to lay a cold hand upon us in the first hours of our bereavement, and paralyzes our energies of mind and body. But Christabel struggled against her personal share of this grief for the sake of the others. It was she who thought for them all, encompassed the twins with her loving care, soothed Katie's tumultuous sorrow, and ministered to Harold with gentle sisterly love. But it was the hardest task to meet her father's passionate self-reproach, and to answer poor Alice's feeble wail of vain regret that she had not been more with her mother, that she had not done more to cheer the long years of invalid life

which had preceded her death. Ah, me! how fruitless is our repentance for sins against the dead! They are for ever beyond the reach of our tears, or any confession of what we have done amiss. Strange it is that an army of offences against those we have loved and lost, should rise up with such uncompromising fidelity when our hearts are first sore stricken with our grief. Strange, too, that we should often go on laying up a harvest of bitter ashes in our daily intercourse with the living, at the very moment in which we are mourning that we have sinned so much against those hid from our sight.

It was near daybreak before Christabel could be alone with her grief. All her mother's tender ready sympathy and loving appreciation of everything she did for her; all the perfect union of thought and feeling which had marked their intercourse for so many years, then came sweeping over her soul with a mingling of sweetness in the memory of the past, and bitterness in the present loss, which I cannot express in words.

Many a time had Christabel thought of St. Aubyn's return, and counted on the sympathy of her mother in that as in everything else. Now he had indeed come back, but his coming had brought no gladness with it. He had appeared for a moment when her whole heart was occupied with her mother's danger, and then, perhaps misinterpreting her silence, without a word he had vanished! He had saved her father's life

and in the midst of the absorbing grief of the last few days, even that had been forgotten. No one spoke his name, or thought of him, no one wished to see him, or thank him for what he had done. Perhaps there never was a moment in her life when Christabel's hope seemed so faint and dim as on the cold, grey, winter morning when, exhausted and overwrought, she lay down upon her bed, and fell at last into a troubled slumber.

Gilbert Francis had not been able to overtake St. Aubyn on the evening when on hearing his name he followed him downstairs and out into the square. St. Aubyn had been too quick for him, and his retreating figure had been soon lost in the thick damp fog which enveloped Bristol, and made the gas lamps give a blurred and uncertain light. St. Aubyn was sick at heart ; but he had come to England with the fixed purpose of finding his father, as well as of discharging the debt to Mr. Kingscote. He must fulfil his intention he said to himself, and then fight on bravely in the path duty pointed out, and struggle upwards and onwards to a better life than this. He had not counted upon all it would cost him to return to Bideford, and to the scenes of years gone by, till he was actually standing on the fine old bridge, with its many arches spanning the river, and the quaint antique houses skirting its quay. Many a time he had seen the old town in his day-dreams, and had gone over the

trials of his boyhood there. The slights and petty annoyances, the hard words and angry retorts, the miserable want of self-control which he had often displayed, the passionate outbursts which he had scarcely tried to repress, when his heart was hot with a sense of injustice and wrong. Through it all there had always risen up the vision of a golden-haired girl, with a quiet serene face, and a voice which soothed him with its tones in his most undisciplined mood—a child, a girl, and then a woman, the guiding star of his boyhood and youth, and now so widely separated from him; for if any doubts had existed as to the truth of his uncle's statement, they would have been set at rest that night, when he heard it said Gilbert Francis would go to Stoke for Christabel, when at last she came with him, and after long years stood before him as the Christabel of his dreams: but not his Christabel—never to be his. He had no bitterness in his heart, no thought of wrong, for there had been no wrong. He had left her free, and bound by no pledge, either of word or look. He did not complain, nor did it enter into his noble heart to depreciate Gilbert, or think himself worthier of Christabel than he was. He was above all such little exaltation of himself and depreciation of another; and as he walked with a firm resolute step through the familiar streets of Bideford, and passed the place where he had stopped Christabel's pony in its mad career, and

won her father's thanks, a sad smile flitted over his face as he said, half aloud and half to himself, "It is better as it is."

Time, which alters everything, had seemed to make Marina an exception to the general rule. The gravel drive was as smooth as ever as St. Aubyn walked up to the door, the steps as faultlessly white, the drawing-room precisely the same as on that morning, years ago, when Christabel had waited there for Miss Rachel's appearance. St. Aubyn was shown into this room by the neat maid-servant who admitted him; and as she failed to receive any answer to her question of "Who shall I say, sir?" departed to tell Miss Rachel that a strange gentleman with a beard was in the drawing-room.

"Dear me," said Miss Rachel; "I hope he scraped his feet, the roads are so dirty; and unless he gave his name, it was very wrong of you, Martha, to show him in—very wrong. He may be some rough person who will be putting his feet on the bright fender, and he'll be fingering the scrap-book, or scratching the table with his stick, or he may be a thief; how can we tell. Let Mr. Beresford know instantly that a gentleman is here. You ought to have shown him into the study at once, not into the drawing-room. You are sure he asked for me?"

"Quite sure, ma'am; and he is a gentleman, if ever there was one. A thief, indeed!" pursued Martha, indignantly, as she went to the study

to tell Mr. Beresford that Miss Rachel had a visitor. "A thief! As if I did not know a gentleman when I see him. Not but what some gentlemen are thieves, more shame for them."

Miss Rachel Beresford drew herself up to her full height as she entered the drawing-room to greet her visitor. She made a prim little curtsy, and looked anxiously at the easy-chair from which St. Aubyn rose, to see if the crochet cover at the back was displaced. Mr. Kingscote had failed to recognize St. Aubyn, as we know, on board the *Filomena*, and he had walked through Bideford and along the road to Northam, feeling secure that if any one should meet him who had known him in days gone by, he would pass unnoticed. Only one there was who had known him at once; only one voice had uttered his name!

Miss Rachel's start of surprise was very genuine as the stranger advanced, and said, "Aunt Rachel."

"Well, really, St. Aubyn, is that you, looking so old too, and so disguised by all that hair. How do you do? And pray where do you spring from? Curious that you should appear to-day of all days in the year, for your uncle has had a letter about you, asking where you are to be found, and now here you are. What can have brought you to England? We were glad to hear you were doing so well in the West Indies. Very glad! Quite a rich man, I suppose, by now?"

"No, not yet," St. Aubyn said ; "but God has prospered me. How is my uncle?"

"Oh, a terrible sufferer, and quite a cripple with rheumatic gout. He does not go to the office now, except on market-days, that is to say, not as a regular thing. He is coming now ; I hear his sticks tapping along the passage."

And then the door opened, and Mr. Beresford came slowly into the room.

"John, do fancy how strange ! this is St. Aubyn. Take care, take care ! let me help you."

"Leave me alone," was the sharp order. "What a fuss you always make, Rachel," he added, stumbling to a chair, into which he sank, with a contraction of the lips and brow which showed how painful the movement was. "So it is you, is it?" he said, turning his dark sinister eyes upon St. Aubyn. "I can't stand affectionate grasps of the hand, so excuse me," as St. Aubyn held out his to his uncle. "Rheumatic gout in one's fingers is a barrier to greetings of that kind."

"I am sorry you are in such a state," St. Aubyn began.

"Sorry ! Oh, I dare say ! But my mind is not affected by rheumatic gout, or my memory either ; and I don't forget how we parted, nor two or three dutiful letters you sent me from Campinas."

"Come, John," interposed Miss Rachel, "let by-gones be by-gones."

"I did not ask you to interfere, Rachel. But

you are come in the nick of time, St. Aubyn. I can now hand over to you this letter, which I received this morning. It is from a gentleman whose name you know, a parson in Bristol. Here, you can read it," he said, tossing the letter towards him. "You will find that your father is in England."

"I knew so much," was St. Aubyn's reply, "and I came to ask you if you could give me any clue to where I could find him."

"Till this morning I could not have done so. Now I wash my hands of the whole concern. You may take the parson's letter, and answer it. As you are so anxious to find your father, this information will relieve your mind."

"I know he is in great poverty," said St. Aubyn, "and it must be my business to try and provide for him."

"Ah, that sounds very fine ; but he won't be burdensome to you or to anyone long if that letter is to be trusted. So you have made your fortune," he went on, in the same contemptuous strain. "You did not fail to write to me when you were poor ; when you left Campinas, and made a good hit in Jamaica, you did not trouble us with letters. Well, it is the way of the world, and I do not blame you more than others."

"I wrote to you and to Aunt Rachel several times, and receiving no answer, I thought you did not wish to continue the correspondence."

"Well, well, let that rest ; I never expected

gratitude from St. Aubyn," said Miss Rachel, "so I was never disappointed. Then there was this to be said, John, that St. Aubyn might suppose, after his conduct in your office one day, he could not be treated with the kindness of former years. It was not likely ; and pray, have you heard anything of the Kingscotes?" Miss Rachel went on, again addressing St. Aubyn. "The married daughter is quite the grand lady ; it amuses me to see her driving about in her handsome carriage, with a man old enough to be her grandfather almost ; and the others go on in Bristol, in straitened circumstances, I suppose. They have quite cut us now, and it certainly is no loss. I did hear that Mr. Kingscote had deserted his poor wife and family, and gone out to India."

St. Aubyn who, during this disjointed chatter of his aunt, had been reading Gilbert's letter, and kept his eyes fixed upon the paper, now looked up. "You heard a false report then, Aunt Rachel. Mr. Kingscote has been in the West Indies on Sir Richard Talwyn's business, and has now returned."

"And pray who told you that," asked Mr. Beresford, in the same sneering disagreeable tone. "You seem to know all about it. Perhaps you can tell me if the eldest daughter is married yet to the writer of that letter. It has been on the tapis long enough now ; Christabel is no chicken by this time."

St. Aubyn's eyes flashed, and his colour rose as in old times. He was beginning, "How dare you speak of her?" when he checked himself. He had learned to rule his spirit since the days of unseemly wrangling with his uncle.

"Do not excite yourself, my good fellow," said Mr. Beresford. "She may have married him already for all I know. The living of St. Olave's, Bristol, is a magnificent piece of preferment, and quite worth waiting for. Perhaps you did not know what the lady's intentions were."

"You took care not to let me be ignorant of them, some years ago; but I do not wish to pursue the subject."

"Ah, ha! a sore point, is it. Well, what do you think of the parson's letter about your father?"

"I must return to Bristol at once."

"Pray, do so, and thank Mr. Francis for his obliging communication. My brother has exhausted my stock of patience, I confess. It is curious that he should refer the parson to me, after keeping back his name for so long. You can tell him I am an invalid myself, and cannot undertake any journey at this inclement season: but I don't mind sending a couple of sovereigns by you, for his present needs."

"Thank you," said St. Aubyn, proudly, "I will not trouble you; I am thankful to say I am independent of any help from you; and I do not think that I need prolong my visit." He rose, and took his hat, and turned to go.

"You must have something to eat first, St. Aubyn," said Miss Rachel, in a hurried tone, half-ashamed of the reception that Mr. Beresford had been giving to the son of an only brother. "St. Aubyn!" and she followed him from the room, for St. Aubyn made no second attempt to shake his uncle by the hand.

"Yes, stop!" shouted Mr. Beresford, "don't be so thin-skinned; stop and dine with us early."

St. Aubyn was strongly inclined to go away without another word, but he made a great effort, and said as courteously as he could that he must hasten back to Bideford, or he should miss the train at Barnstaple. After all, the prominent feeling in his heart for his uncle was pity. Hard indeed is the crust with which double-dealing and worldly selfishness covers the heart, given up wholly to their influence. And what is a sadder sight than a man who has so surrendered himself failing in bodily health, and finding the riches, for which he has sacrificed truth and sincerity, of no avail to comfort him in his hours of pain.

"And your uncle does suffer frightful pain at times," said Miss Rachel, apologetically, as she stood with St. Aubyn in the hall, "his temper is quite soured by it, and I wonder sometimes how I am to bear it. But he has no friend that can be of any use to him, and he suspects everyone, and there are often dreadful scenes with the clerks when they come from the office with the papers, and clients are, no doubt, falling off. I

hope, St. Aubyn, you will bear us no ill-will," she continued, with something of a quiver in her voice, "and tell poor Frank I am sorry he is reduced to such a condition. Dear me!" said Miss Rachel, going back to a past where St. Aubyn could not follow her; "dear me, it is well our poor mother did not live to see both her sons brought so low."

St. Aubyn pressed his aunt's hand kindly, and as he opened the gate of Marina and looked back she waved her hand to him, and tears were in her eyes as she returned to her hard and dreary life.

CHAPTER XII.

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS.

“ When some beloved voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease, and new—
What Hope? What Help? What music will undo
That silence to your sense? Not friendship's sigh,
Not reason's subtle count. . . ,
. Nay—none of these!
Speak *Thou* availing Christ! and fill this pause.”

E. B. BROWNING.

THE dreary days had gone on in the silent and darkened house in Adelaide Square, and in the hush and stillness of everything around, Christabel had held communion with the dead. Then came that time, known by sad experience to most, if not to all of us, when the shutters are unclosed, and the blinds drawn up, and we who are left behind our dear ones, who are called up thither, are launched once more on the tide of busy human life, the life which is now to begin without them. Duty summons us to

thought and care for the present and the living, and removes us in some measure from dwelling exclusively upon the absent and the past. Like all the necessities of our being, this is, however, painful, salutary, and beneficial ; and those who resist it and give themselves up to a morbid shrinking from active service and daily duties are those on whom the weight of sorrow falls most heavily, and on whom it has ever the least sanctifying and exalting power.

It was the evening of the day after Mrs. Kingscote had been laid in her last quiet resting-place that Christabel sat with her father in the room he used as his study. The Adairs were gone, and a sense of relief, Christabel was sorry to acknowledge even to herself, was felt throughout the household. Katie was kind and helpful in interesting herself with the twins' pursuits, and trying to rouse herself from her grief for their sakes. Harold sat dreamily by the drawing-room fire with a book in his hand, making an attempt to read, and wondering within himself how long Christabel would be with her father, and wishing she would come back. But the time went on, and Willie and Harry departed to bed, and still Christabel did not come. Harold rose from his seat at last, and paced up and down the drawing-room, stopping every now and then to stroke Katie's hair, who was weeping silently over a little book of sketches she had opened carelessly, and from which had fallen

several pictures of her mother's, all telling a tale of lingering love for Heatherington, and for their old home. For the words "from memory" were written, with the date, under most of the drawings, which made them interesting in no common degree to her children.

Meanwhile Christabel and her father sat together in the study. Mr. Kingscote eagerly listening to every detail of the last few months, and breaking out now and then into the most uncontrollable expressions of self-reproach for harsh words and coldness of manner towards his wife. It was almost a relief to Christabel to hear Gilbert Francis's well-known step, and his knock at the study door. Mr. Kingscote greeted him with something of his old proud manner, and Gilbert began the subject uppermost in his mind at once: "Mr. Kingscote, I am only come in for a few moments. I have not liked to intrude upon your sorrow before, or to trouble you with this matter, but I have a message for you from a parishioner of mine, whose days or even hours are numbered: his name is Francis Beresford. His son," Gilbert continued, not heeding Mr. Kingscote's gesture of surprise; "his son came to this house with you on the night of your return; he saved your life at Liverpool, and is now with his father; he has removed him from a poor lodging in Church Row to comfortable rooms in this square; my message from St. Aubyn's father is an urgent request that you

would go and see him and assure him that you forgive him some offence against you, which he repents most deeply now."

Mr. Kingscote did not speak. He had risen from his chair, and stood leaning on the chimney-piece, his face buried in his hands. He did not choose that Gilbert should see the traces of deep emotion which his conversation with Christabel had left there.

"Father, you will go—will you not?" Christabel said, after a pause, putting her hand through her father's arm. "Father, do go, and let Mr. Beresford know he is forgiven."

Mr. Kingscote spoke at last. "I am broken down, very much broken down by my troubles; I do not think I can go to see this man. The flood of painful recollections would be more than I could bear, Christabel; do not ask me."

"Yes, father, I do ask you," said Christabel, firmly; "remember," she urged in a gentle pleading tone, "that St. Aubyn was ready to risk his life for you; surely you will show your gratitude to him by doing as his father wishes."

"I think," said Gilbert, "I must urge upon you, Mr. Kingscote, the painful duty of complying with this request. Forgive as you would be forgiven. Come with me at once to see this poor man."

Mr. Kingscote's answer was chilling and unsatisfactory. "This is not precisely the moment, Mr. Francis, to choose for preaching to me. I

dislike extempore sermons at all times, and were I not grateful to you for your kindness to her who is gone, I should at once beg you to say no more. As it is I must ask you to leave the subject to-night. To-morrow I will let you know my decision."

"To-morrow may be too late," was Gilbert's short answer; "but I will not press the matter further, and say good-night."

"He is not a favourite of mine, that stiff-backed Francis," Mr. Kingscote said, as Gilbert left the room. "I am glad, Christabel, he never took you away from us; he is cold enough in his manner to you now. But your dear mother liked him, did she not?"

"Oh, yes; and he has been so good to us all; he has taught us so much. I hope, dearest father, you will go and do as he wishes to-morrow."

"Not because he wishes it, Christabel, certainly! No, I think the time was ill chosen to ask me to perform so painful a task; and he was so abrupt too."

"He did not mean to be, father. I heard from Bertha two or three days ago that this poor destitute man was Mr. Francis Beresford. They could not find out who he was for some time, but the morning of the day you came home he asked Mr. Francis to write to his brother at Bideford, and let him know he was in great poverty at Bristol."

"He is the greater rascal of the two, no doubt," said Mr. Kingscote.

Christabel did not contradict the assertion; but went on, "When St. Aubyn came into the house with you that night, amidst all the distress about our darling mother, his name was not mentioned. But when I saw him, I remembered him at once, and told Mr. Francis his name. He tried to overtake him on his way back to the station, but failed. St. Aubyn went to Bideford, and reached Marina two or three hours after the post had taken Gilbert's letter there, written to ask help for St. Aubyn's father on the very morning of the day on which he came here to Bristol with you."

"It was a strange coincidence; and so you remembered St. Aubyn? Well, I was on board the *Filomena* for fifteen days with him, and though his face was in some way familiar, I never connected him with the boy I recollected some years ago. You must have a good memory, Christabel."

"Yes," she said, "I think I have. I should have known St. Aubyn Beresford anywhere. Father, you will go to that poor man; remember Mr. Francis said to-morrow may be too late. Father," she repeated, "think of what *she* would have wished; think of how full of love and forgiveness she ever was. There is no doubt of what mother would say if she were here."

Mr. Kingscote turned away with a sigh. "Ah!"

he said, "I cannot talk any more now. Go upstairs, Christabel; I dare say the children need you; I am a broken-down man, and the best of life is over for me."

"But the best life is before you, dear father, before us all: let us hold that hope firmly; when earthly hopes fail, it will stand fast. Oh! father, I could not live, I think, if I had not that hope."

"It is well for you, Christabel, to say it and to feel it. Leave me alone now."

She knew her father too well to press him any more, but she left him with a gentle kiss, and a low whisper, "Remember the words Gilbert said, 'Forgive as you would be forgiven.'"

"Yes, yes; it is all very true; but I am in no state of mind or body to go out to-night into a distressing, exciting scene. I wonder you should wish it, Christabel. Good-night."

When his daughter had left him, Mr. Kingscote paced restlessly up and down the room; the voice within would not be altogether silenced, and the words which his child had whispered in his ear were repeated again and again. Then there came before his mind the events of the last few days, his own near approach to death, and the arm which had saved him; the resolutions he had made to be always loving and gentle to his wife thenceforth, never again to wound her gentle spirit, never again to meet her love with coldness—never again! No, never again; for she was gone beyond the reach of all earthly

voices, into the land of eternal peace ! It was no longer necessary to soothe and comfort, no longer possible to distress and vex her soul. The power to do either was taken from him for ever ! It is not for us to follow the train of Mr. Kingscote's thoughts through all its windings, or to trace to its source the resolution which he took at last. But perhaps, with the full meaning of the words "too late" strongly impressed on his soul, he durst not set aside his conviction of right ; and so, as the clocks were striking eleven, he opened the hall door, and passed out into the dark deserted square.

An hour later, Christabel, sitting in her own room, was startled by a tap at her door. She rose to open it, and her father stood there.

"Christabel, I have done as you wished. I have seen Frank Beresford ; and he knows from my own lips I have forgiven him."

"Oh, father, I am so thankful !"

"It would ill become me to withhold forgiveness from him, I that need so much myself. It was a sad sight,—a man laid low in his prime, dependent on his son for everything, looking up to him like a child, and clinging to him in his helplessness. St. Aubyn is a fine fellow. It is a pity that he has as his inheritance only a disgraced name."

"He may live to make it honourable ; he has done so already," said Christabel.

"I was struck with the power Gilbert Francis

has over the sick man," Mr. Kingscote continued, "and how fervently he responded to what he said. He is peculiar, and not attractive ; but I can't help feeling he has got hold of the real thing ; and that it must be real to make him give up ease and comfort and every thought of himself for the sake of others. He is going to stay with poor Beresford all night."

"No one who knows him can doubt he is good and true," said Christabel, earnestly ; "his faith does not end in words merely, but brings forth fruit. Oh, father," and Christabel laid her hand on her father's shoulder, "oh, father, let us try to get nearer to God."

Mr. Kingscote pressed his daughter close and kissed her hair, and stroked it gently. "My child, you must pray for me," he said, "that I may see your mother again."

"Yes, father ; I do ; I will. Look here," she said, "here is mother's prayer-book," turning to the table, and taking up a little book from it ; "here is her mark against this prayer for All Saints' day. Let us pray this prayer daily, you and I. You know that prayer, father ?"

"No," he said ; "I am afraid I don't ; read it."

Then Christabel read words which are familiar to us all, no doubt ; the prayer that once every year we hear sounding in our ears, perhaps take on our lips ; but of which we do not gather the full meaning till we stand, as Mr. Kingscote and Christabel now stood, left behind on the brink

of the stream over which some beloved one has but lately crossed. Countless stricken hearts have then taken comfort from the thought of that "one communion and fellowship" in which the elect of God are knit. Countless weary and fainting ones have thanked Him and taken courage, and careless and cold hearts have striven to pray in all the earnestness of reawakening faith for grace to follow the blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, reaching forward to the unspeakable joys prepared for those who love unto the end. Mr. Kingscote took the prayer-book from Christabel's hand as she finished the collect in her clear sweet tones, and saying "Good-night," he went to his room. There we cannot follow him; but the proud knee was bent, and the stately head bowed, as the voice which had an hour or two before repeated words of forgiveness to one who had offended against him, now pleaded for pardon from Him who pities as a father pities his children, and for His dear Son's sake refuseth none who come to Him in His name.

Several weeks had passed by, and Harold Kingscote was gone back to Oxford, and Katie and Christabel began their life in Bristol, with their young brothers and their father, and every day the blank and the void grew greater in Christabel's heart. She exerted herself for her father's comfort, and was a tender elder sister as she had ever been; but there was a listlessness and

apathy creeping over her, against which she struggled, and which she found it daily harder and harder to resist. The only human ear to whom the story of St. Aubyn's love had been told was closed for ever. Mrs. Kingscote had never repeated it to her husband, well knowing how the name of Beresford always irritated him, and thinking, if not hoping, that there never would be any need for discussing the subject with him.

Mr. Beresford died, and was buried in the cemetery near Bristol, and Mr. Kingscote followed him to his grave with Harold and his own son, and poor Mr. and Mrs. Watts, the landlady and her husband in Church Row, who had been with him in his most desolate days, and in whose honest hearts he had really awakened a true interest and attachment. St. Aubyn's arrival at Bristol and the removal of his father to the comfortable lodgings in Adelaide Square, had not made them angry. It was only a pleasant confirmation of Mrs. Watts's early declaration that poor and friendless as their lodger seemed, with scarcely more than a coat to his back, "he was a born gentleman."

St. Aubyn had returned from his father's grave sad and quiet. He kept on the lodgings in Adelaide Square for a week, till he had settled all the expenses of the funeral, and then he told Gilbert Francis he was going to London on business. Twice coming out of St. Olave's

church Christabel and Katie had seen him. He had spoken to them both, just the necessary words of salutation, but no more.

On the evening before he was to leave Bristol the Vicar touched him on the shoulder as he was going into his own house, and said, "Come home with me to-night, and see my sister."

St. Aubyn drew back, with a sort of shrinking Gilbert could not understand, and declined the invitation, as he had done again and again during the last few days.

But Gilbert would not be repulsed. "Take a turn with me, then, or let me come into your room. I should like to hear something of your future, and so would Mr. Kingscote. Surely, you have no lingering feeling against him, after what passed between him and your poor father on the last night of his life; surely ——"

"You entirely mistake me," said St. Aubyn. "I have nothing but kindly feelings towards Mr. Kingscote. I am only sorry that he will not let me do that which I desire,—repay him part at least of the money he lost years ago. I cannot offer the whole now, but it shall follow in time, please God."

"Did you mention your wish to Harold, or to Christabel—Miss Kingscote?" Gilbert said, correcting himself.

"I only saw Harold once. I urged him as much as I could, but he would not see the matter as I wished, and said the dead past

must bury its dead. Like Mr. Kingscote, he refuses to accept the money from me. I suppose they are too proud to do so," said St. Aubyn, bitterly.

"I wonder you do not go and talk to Miss Kingscote about it. Indeed, I think they all wish you would go and see them."

"I have seen Mr. Kingscote two or three times at his office," said St. Aubyn, "that will suffice. This is my last day in Bristol; I must go to London to-morrow."

Gilbert was silent for a few minutes, and then St. Aubyn said, "Mr. Francis, I feel you must think me very surly and ungracious. You must forgive me. I am not really ungrateful for what you have done for my poor father, but the weight of a heavy disappointment oppresses me just now. I stand very much alone in the world. My relations at Bideford are, as you know, nothing to me. I had only one earthly hope, and that has failed me—failed me years ago; but latterly the utter barrenness of the field where I had looked once to gather golden sheaves, has been brought before me."

"A treasure in the heavens, which fadeth not," the Vicar said; "one hope, which maketh not ashamed. Earthly mists dim the brightness of that hope sometimes, but this is God's will for us; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? I have had a lesson like yours; but I see how well it is for me that no earthly tie should

draw me from my service to God and His church."

"You cannot know what my trial is," said St. Aubyn, coldly. "Good-night."

"Let us part as friends," said Gilbert, holding out his hand.

St. Aubyn took it, and pressed it warmly. "I go to-morrow morning," he said. "I will send you my address, that you may let me have the bill for the stone at the cemetery, or any other little expenses which may crop up. I shall sail for the West Indies next month; though I may hear something in London which will greatly alter my future life."

And so they parted, Gilbert regretfully acknowledging that he had failed to make any friendship with St. Aubyn, or to exercise any influence over him; St. Aubyn, to tell himself for the hundredth time that he was not so worthy of Christabel as Gilbert was; and that doubtless it was, as the landlady of the house in Adelaide Square had said, "Miss Kingscote was made for a clergyman's wife, and was that useful in the parish already it was surprising. People did say, that when the vicar married, he would live in a better house than 3, Myrtle Place."

Poor St. Aubyn had to hear all this, and a great deal more, from Mrs. Smith, when he settled his account with her that night; and he had had previously to listen to the same story from Mrs. Watts! For the parish of St. Olave's

had long ago settled that the vicar was to marry Miss Kingscote, and the parish was, as in thousands of similar instances, wrong.

"There is a something weighing upon his mind, over and above the death of his poor father," Mrs. Smith decreed, when, having taken leave of St. Aubyn, she sat down with her husband to her comfortable supper that night. "Hark to him now, tramp, tramp, in the drawing-room ; that is how he goes on every evening. It is enough to wear out the new tapestry carpet, that it is ! but I didn't like to mention it, seeing that he is not going to remain, and the time has been so short. There is something very taking in him, and I never saw such eyes, they are like a child's more than a grown man's, like our poor Charlie's when he was dying."

"Why, my dear," was Mr. Smith's rejoinder, "you get quite romantic about the young man ; it ain't so pleasant to have a death in the house, and if we had not had such a terrible flat time of it, I shouldn't have consented to take in that poor gentleman, as I did ; a lodger from a place like Church Row too !"

"Well, Smith, you ain't so hard-hearted as you seem, and you know very well we have made it worth our while, and have been paid handsome. Money isn't no object to Mr. St. Aubyn, that's very clear. Still I do wish he would stop that marching of his, it quite worries me to hear him."

But the marching did not stop for a long, long time, and then St. Aubyn seated himself at a table, and drawing out his writing-case, wrote a few lines on one side of a sheet of paper, put it in an envelope, and addressed it. With a sigh of relief he again began his walk up and down Mrs. Smith's tapestry carpet till near day-break, when he stretched himself on the sofa, where the little maid-servant found him asleep, when she tumbled into the room the next morning, to open the shutters, and make preparations for his early breakfast.

"Let that note be taken to No. 3 in Adelaide Square, in the course of the day," he said, pointing to the letter on the chimneypiece, standing up against one of Mrs. Smith's gold and white jars. "Do not forget it, please," St. Aubyn added, as he ran downstairs to the door, where a fly waited to take him to the station.

It was a soft February day, lovely and pleasant in the country, with the first faint promise of spring. Even in the city the air blew gently from the river, and the feathery clouds floated over the church towers and the tall factory chimneys, and in the flower boxes in many a window a tiny pointed sheath of green pressed upwards to proclaim that spring was come, and winter was over and gone. Christabel Kingscote sat in the drawing-room with some little manuscript books before her, in which she read with deep interest the memorials her mother had left

behind, of thought and feeling so precious to the survivors when the hand that guided the pen, as the little familiar details were noted down, is at rest from all such labours for ever. Katie was working by the window, talking now and then to her sister, and listening as she read a fragment here and there from their mother's little record of days and years gone by. A letter with a border of black on the envelope which left scarcely room for the address, lay on Katie's work-table. It was from Alice; a request that Katie would go to Abbot's Court soon, for, unable to go through her usual round of visiting, Alice found the country intolerably dull.

"I think you had better go to Abbot's Court, Katie," Christabel said, as Katie's work dropped from her fingers, and she leaned back with something of a yawn and a sigh; "I am very dull, darling, I feel," Christabel continued, "and almost cross, *quite* cross sometimes. I was provoked with Alice when I read that letter just now, not with you."

"I know that, dear," Katie said, "but, Christabel, I think you want a change more than I do. Will you go to Abbot's Court?"

"I!" Christabel exclaimed. "No, indeed, Katie. I do not know when I shall leave papa, never, I think; and then when I remember the last time I went away"—Christabel broke down and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh Christabel, dear!" said Katie, and leav-

ing her seat she came near her sister and knelt down by her. "Don't think of that, darling; mother wished you to go to Stoke. You did that, as you did everything, Christabel, more to please her than to please yourself. Christabel, I wish I had as little to reproach myself with as you have. Harold and I often say there never was such a daughter as you were, as you are. For what would our father do without you?"

"You think too well of me, Katie;" but Christabel smiled through her tears, and rallying herself, went on turning over the leaves of the MS. book, reading aloud little fragments of verse and prose, some copied, some original. There were a few stanzas evidently written when they first lived at Bristol, when Mr. Kingscote was gone to Heatherington to see Mr. Henderson about some alteration he wished to make there, in the gardens and plantations. The verses were so simple and pathetic, and seemed to bring their gentle mother back to the two girls.

"I shall copy them and send them to Harold," said Katie. "Will you read them to papa, Christabel?"

"Yes," Christabel answered, "or I shall give him all this book to look over: it would do every one good to read it, and these dear little sketches, too, round the margin, how pretty they are!"

"Read those verses once more, Christabel," Katie said; "your voice is so like mother's."

"The last verses have come true," Christabel said ; "that hope she wrote of was not disappointed."

"But a hope dawns brightly in my soul,
To hush each vain regret,
Our sun is only hidden,
And not for ever set ;
I cannot tell—but still I dream
Of coming days and years—
When purified our love shall seem
More tender through our tears.

I sometimes think that sorrow
Will call it forth again,
That God may send us trouble
To reunite the chain ;
That sympathy in wintry storms
Shall draw our hearts together,
With a steadfastness and clinging truth
Unknown in summer weather.

I sometimes think it will be so,
But I know not—only GOD,
Though I feel that I could bear the weight
E'en of His chastening rod,
If it should bring us *both* to *Him*,
And so make pure the love
We pledged upon that moonlight shore,
With the starry sky above."

Thus going over the past as connected with their mother, Katie and Christabel drew very near together. This morning Christabel was almost inclined to tell her of the weight at her heart, growing every day heavier; that she had kept her love for St. Aubyn all through these

seven long, long years, and that now he had come back, and had never cared to claim it ; that she was not to be the San Christabel he had told her of ; that he needed her no more. That very day, at their early dinner, her father mentioned that he had taken leave of him at his office the day before, and praised him as he always did now, and had expressed his surprise that he had not come to see his daughters. " He is altogether a man I do not understand," Mr. Kingscote had said ; " he seems very much depressed and melancholy, and yet his prospects in the West Indies are excellent. He may almost be a second Sir Richard some day, especially if he marries an heiress. I hope one day I may be able to show my appreciation of that gallant act of his in saving my life. I told him my daughters would like to see him, but he only said he needed no thanks."

" He spoke to us once," said Gemini, " as we were coming home from school, and said he remembered us and a dog called Puff we had at Heatherington."

" I remember old Puff," said Katie ; " we brought a puppy of hers here, and it fell down the area steps and was killed. And I remember one of your last acts at Heatherington, Gemini, was to build a house for Puff and her children. But old Jacob drowned the children before the house was finished."

So the conversation was kept up by Katie and

the boys, Christabel saying nothing. Her father was always tender and kind to her, and noticed that she seemed unusually quiet and sad.

"This is a half holiday," the twins said. "Katie, will you take us up to Clifton, and let us go to the sea wall; it is a high tide, and we shall see lots of ships sailing out to the channel."

"You will go too, Christabel, I hope," said her father.

"No thanks, dear papa, I could not walk so far to-day;" and an ominous trembling in her voice warned her to say no more.

"You must see Dr. Musgrave," Mr. Kingscote said. "You eat nothing, Christabel," he said, anxiously; "you must go to Abbot's Court with Katie."

"No, father, I think not, thank you. Besides, Alice does not ask me."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Kingscote, with something of his old asperity. "Sisters need not stand on any ceremony with each other, I should think. Indeed, Christabel, I shall insist on your going. The North Devon air will set you up."

"We are all going to live in the country this summer, are we not?" said Harry.

A warning glance from Katie stopped Willy, who was beginning, "Oh! that will be jolly." For Mr. Kingscote pushed back his chair with a heavy sigh, saying, "I don't know which of us would care for the country now," and then he went away to his office.

When Katie and the boys had started for their walk, Christabel roused herself and went to Myrtle Place to see Bertha Francis.

"I must try to get some hard, real work," she said, in answer to Bertha's inquiries as to how she was; "the days are so long, and everything is such a blank. I had always mother to think of and care for, always her welcome ready when I went home, always her sympathy and advice—and now! You must help me to think of something to do," she continued, "which will take me away from my own thoughts. Just now I seem more inclined to sit and dream with folded hands, reading over every word she has written, looking at all her work and her sketches, and living in the past. I know it is neither good for me or right either."

"Poor dear child," said Bertha. "These are dark days; but brighter ones will come. I can enter into your loss so well. You miss a friend as well as a mother."

"Bertha," said Christabel, suddenly, "you have said sometimes that there was a subject you never liked to touch upon with me, and that you have felt that I avoided it. It has been partly true. Now I am going to tell you something which no one but my mother ever knew. Years ago, one bright May morning,—whenever I think of it I seem to see the fox-gloves nodding on the hill-side, and to hear the sound of the sea on the pebble ridge at Northam,

—one bright May morning, some one whom I had known from a boy, he was not then much more than a boy in years, told me he loved me with a man's true-hearted love. My heart sprang up at once and made an entire response to him, but my lips did not. He asked from me no promise, and I gave none. I told my mother about it. I told her everything. I showed her a book and a letter he sent me the night before he left England, and she knew what I felt. Well, he left England, and I saw him no more till the dreadful night when I came home from Stoke Bishop. Then I saw him, just when my heart was full of my mother's danger and my absence from her when she needed me most. I heard them say he had saved my father's life. But, though I pronounced his name, and he must have known I remembered him, he looked at me with a strange expression on his face, which I noticed even then, and went away, out of the house, without a word. Then he was here quite near me in Adelaide Square for some time; but he never came, he never wrote. I met him twice face to face, and we spoke to each other as mere acquaintances might speak, and that was all. That was all, Bertha! I could not let him know, can never let him know, that all these years I have loved him, and prayed for him, and thought of him as I can never think of any one again. But it is hard that the love I have preserved from all blight

and change for him, and him alone, should be nothing to him now, that he does not care for it, or need it. Perhaps he has found some one else; perhaps—but I cannot talk about uncertainties. The only thing left for me is to meet the certainty as bravely as I can. You must help me, Bertha, for I am very weak and faint-hearted.”

She tried to smile as she looked up in her friend's kindly gentle face; but it would not do; and laying her head upon Bertha's knee as she sat on the footstool by her sofa, she let her tears have their way.

Bertha Francis was too skilful in the art of sympathy to say very much in reply; but she soothed and comforted with a few tender wise words, asking at last, “May I tell Gilbert this?”

Christabel raised her head quickly, and her face was crimson. “Yes, I think you may. You know now, Bertha, why I could not do as he wished, as—as you wished.”

“Yes,” said Bertha; “I know now. It was, it has been a mystery to me, Christabel, especially this last time. But let that pass now.”

Unconsciously, in these words Bertha disclosed how impossible it seemed to her to know her brother and not love him. He was still, as he had ever been, her ideal of all that was loveable and good and true. That Christabel should have failed to see him in this light also, had ever been the one thing lacking

in her in Bertha's eyes. She was almost glad now to know that there was a reason which was strong, and not to be gainsaid, for Christabel's persistent refusal of her brother's love.

That evening Bertha told Gilbert what Christabel had told her, beginning cautiously, lest she should say too much, and wondering what effect her words would have on him. He sat silently thinking it all over for some time after his sister ceased speaking; then merely saying, "I think I see the reason now of a great deal that has puzzled me," he left the room, and going to his little study, shut himself in from all disturbance, and Bertha saw him no more that night. But in the morning he was brighter and more cheerful than she had known him for some weeks; and as he went to his service in St. Olave's church, he dropped a letter into the pillar lately erected at the corner of Adelaide Square, and that letter was addressed to St. Aubyn Beresford.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOPE ON, HOPE EVER.

"Let the wind blow and billows roll,
Hope is the anchor of my soul;
It fastens on a land unknown
And moors me to my Father's throne."

"CHRISTABEL! I expected to see Katie!" was Alice Adair's welcome, as Christabel stepped into the handsome carriage from Abbot's Court, which was waiting at the coach-office at Bideford.

"They made me come instead," said Christabel. "I hope you are not very much disappointed. I began to think father was right, and that I should not be better till I had changed the scene for a few days. I can't sleep, and I have been so much engrossed with arranging all dearest mother's papers, and I have not been as bright as I ought, or wished."

"Well, you will not find me very bright," said Alice; "I really can scarcely get through the days, and Katie's music is always such a pleasure

to me." But feeling that she was ungracious, she added, "I am very thankful to have either of you, and when you go home Katie must come. Lena, of all people, is coming to-morrow; we did not know it till this morning, and I had not the faintest idea of it when I wrote to Katie on Wednesday. Lena will be in dreadful spirits too, I expect. She has never been here since the boy died, and this little girl is fearfully spoiled. Sir Robert is come to England about that man I told you of. How is papa!" she asked, after a silence.

"Pretty well, I think. How beautiful it all looks!" Christabel said, sitting upright in the luxurious carriage, and looking out upon all the familiar objects, which she had not seen for four years. Then her mother was with her, but the visit at Abbot's Court had been scarcely as much pleasure as pain to Mrs. Kingscote, and Christabel went further back in her memories for her musing. The fresh salt air blowing off the sea revived her, and the fitful gleams of February sunlight across the hills seemed to gladden her heart: a message to tell of the eternal spring of Paradise, which is radiant with never withering flowers.

Alice kept up a flow of small trivial talk, to which she did not require or expect her sister to make much reply. A great deal of it turned on the troubles of servants; and how much she disliked the idea of Prynne's arrival with Lena.

"She always contrives," Alice said, "to make mischief; indeed, old servants are proverbially one's mistresses, and poor Lena is quite under Prynne's hand. I never can imagine how it is that Lena keeps such an intolerable woman."

Christabel's opinion was that Mrs. Preston was far less agreeable than Prynne, but she made no rejoinder to her sister's observations.

There was yet daylight enough when they arrived at Abbot's Court for Christabel to escape from the drawing-room, and take a rapid walk through the plantations to the spot whence she could see the sea, and the dark outline of Lundy Island, where, to her great delight, the lighthouse had just kindled its lamp. How often had she watched that revolving speck of light with her mother, from the old cliff-house. How often in the dull days in the heart of Bristol had her mother referred to it. "But is she not where there is no more sea," was Christabel's happy thought, as she turned away from the little wooden summer-house which commanded this view. No more sea, and no more strong billows, no deceitful calms, and no tumultuous gales; she was in the desired haven, and could Christabel doubt that she was glad because she had rest, brought thither by the loving hand of Him who guided her there in peace. "I am glad I came," thought Christabel, as she turned quickly homewards across the grassy path of the plantation, wet with dew, and full of mysterious shadows in

the spring twilight. A pale daffodil-coloured sky showed through the branches of the fir trees, and above her head a few bright stars looked down, like earnest eyes watching over her. Here and there a rabbit darted before her, or a sudden rustle in the branches, and a quivering of the tassels of the larches, startled her, as a squirrel sprang upwards to his nest. "I am glad I came," she thought, "I am glad I came, for there is no medicine to heal sickness of mind and body like the free fresh air under God's heaven, and the sights and sounds of the country."

Out of doors Christabel had nothing left to wish for. Within it was different, she felt that a great gulf was set between her sister and herself; her sister whose very mourning, in its redundancy of crape flounces and jet ornaments, was so different to her own plain black dress! a dress which caught Mr. Adair's displeased glance as he sat down to his dinner-table, where everyone was expected to dress *en règle*, and where, night after night, the same ceremony of courses was gone through, whether there were four or fourteen people gathered round it. In the drawing-room afterwards it was the same. Alice showed no inclination to talk of their mother, she could not bear it, she said, and indeed it seemed to be so, for she began to sob hysterically when Christabel gave her some of her mother's papers to read, and then, afraid that Mr. Adair should come in

and find her crying, she took the book out of her sister's hand, and replaced it in her work-basket.

But it was very hard to realize that they had played together on the lawn at Heatherington ; that they had prayed the same childish prayers at one mother's knee, and gone there with the same childish griefs and joys. Alas ! when the cold hand of the world touches the warm springs of early association and tender memories, and turns them into ice. Alas ! when the ties of childhood cease to bind together kindred hearts, and weary men and anxious women forget that they were once children gathered round the same hearth, dreaming the dreams of infancy on the same pillow.

It was a relief rather than otherwise to Christabel when, the next day, Lady L'Estrange and her little girl arrived. Whatever it might cost Lena to cross the threshold of her early home, where her first-born child had been stricken unto death, she made no vehement demonstration of her feelings. Lena L'Estrange was subdued and gentle. Her brilliant beauty had faded ; but she was infinitely more attractive now to Christabel than in days gone by. Her manner to Alice was quiet and affectionate, to her father tender and winning ; and Christabel wondered at her self-possession, and the natural and easy way in which she accepted the changed aspect of affairs at Abbot's Court.

Once she had reigned supreme there ; once she had been the sole object of her father's love and care. Doubtless it was a trial to see her place taken by a girl of her own age, and that girl one who had been her chosen friend in days gone by.

Christabel had gone to her room early for the night, thinking that Mr. Adair might feel her presence a restraint on his daughter's first arrival, when she was surprised to hear a gentle tap at her door, and Lena's voice say, "May I come in?"

Christabel hastened to meet her visitor, and make her comfortable in an easy-chair by the fire. She had let down her cloud of golden hair over her shoulders, and as Lena sat opposite to her, she looked earnestly at her. "How little you are altered, Christabel ; you look younger than Alice, and far younger than I do ; but then I am changed by sorrow."

"I have had my sorrows too," said Christabel, gently.

"I know ; and you were so devoted to your mother. Oh, I wish I had known my mother ! There can be no love quite like it. I can tell that by my love for my own children. Christabel, when our boy was taken from us here, I did think my heart would have broken. All the circumstances were so very painful, you know. They would not believe he was so ill, and my father persisted that it would be soon enough in the morning to send again for the doctor. Alice said I was nervous ; and Robert

was not here ; so we did wait till the morning. Oh, Christabel ! it was too late then. It was diphtheria, and he was sinking ; the evening before he might have been saved ! Then came the panic in the house about infection, and my father and Alice rushed away, and only poor Cousin Nan stayed with us—with Robert and me. But I had Robert, she added tenderly, and I have him now, and little Allie. I try not to be anxious about her ; but it is a very great trial to me to come here."

"I am sure it must be," said Christabel ; "I have felt so much for you."

"It will be better when Robert comes. He has to give some evidence on a trial to-morrow in London, which may save a man from transportation for life—the husband of our darling's faithful nurse. We came from Dresden on purpose. But I think we shall go on living abroad. The life suits Robert, and he is so fond of pictures, and paints so beautifully himself, and copies so many in the galleries. We are not rich, and Robert's place is so very large, and most expensive to keep up ; so we let it. Tell me about my cousins Gilbert and Bertha Francis. You have seen a great deal of them, have you not?"

"Yes ; Mr. Francis is vicar of St. Olave's, our parish church in Bristol."

"And Gilbert is turned into a hard-working clergyman : lazy Gilbert, as we used to call him. How he used to contradict me and lecture me

in those old days ; but I always liked him, and he taught me a great deal when we were together abroad. Is he strong now ?”

“ Yes ; I think so. Bertha too is better than she used to be, though she has attacks of that bad pain still sometimes.”

“ We used to think that you would marry Gilbert,” Lena went on. “ People said it was to be. I could almost wish they had been right. I did not mean to vex you,” Lena added, as she saw a cloud upon Christabel’s face. “ Forgive me : I am still careless in my words, but not, I hope, as I once was.”

“ I do not think I shall marry any one,” Christabel said, with a smile. “ You need not be afraid that you have vexed me ; and as to your cousin, Mr. Francis, he is a most zealous and faithful clergyman. You could not call him ‘ lazy Gilbert ’ now. And Bertha is a good sister, as she has always been.”

“ Poor dear old Bertha ! I must go and see her in Laurel Place.”

“ Myrtle Place, you mean,” corrected Christabel, with a smile.

“ They do not come here now, I suppose,” Lena said. “ Like good Cousin Nan, and like me, they have vanished from Abbot’s Court ! Christabel, if we did not feel sure that our lives were all ordered and appointed for us by Love, how could we endure to the end ?”

“ How, indeed ?” was all Christabel said ; but

those words struck an answering chord of sympathy, and it was not till Prynne appeared to tell her lady that it was very late, that Lena rose to go.

"Come and look at my baby," she said, "she looks so pretty asleep, does she not, Prynne?"

"Yes, my lady; Miss L'Estrange is a very pretty child, asleep or awake, as she has a right to be."

"Miss L'Estrange! my sweet Allie is not two years old; we may still call her baby. Here she is!" and Lena bent over the little bed where the child lay, in the room that had been her own sitting-room before she married. Little Allie was indeed a pretty child, and Christabel touched the tiny hand tenderly as it lay upon the sheet. "She is not like *him*,—my Douglas! my Douglas! she is as fair as a lily, but *he* was dark and had eyes like a gazelle! Oh, that I should never, never see those eyes again!" and for a moment a passion of tears overcame the poor mother, and she laid her head upon Christabel's shoulders, sobbing bitterly.

"And yet you would not call him back, dear," said Christabel; "he is still your own, and your treasure is safe, where no harm can ever touch him again."

"I know it, I know it, but, Christabel, it is hard to part from a child like Douglas. Prynne knows what he was."

Prynne's eyes were dim with tears, but she only said in her precise manner, "I do, indeed ;

but your ladyship ought to be in bed now. You have had a long journey to-day, and a great deal to try you in returning here, as is only natural, and you want a good night's rest. For her ladyship is far from strong," Prynnne added, turning to Christabel, reproachfully, as if to imply that she had been the cause of her sitting up so late.

"I will come now, Prynnne," said Lena. "Good-night, dear Christabel." Then, with a lingering look at her child, Lady L'Estrange left the room, and Christabel returned to hers.

"I suppose you will go to see your old home, Christabel?" said Mr. Adair, the next morning at breakfast. "The place is greatly improved by Mr. Henderson's taste ; he has spent a great deal upon it. You are fortunate in having such tenants !"

"The Hendersons are away from home just now," said Alice, "and do not return till next week."

This was good news to Christabel ; she had shrunk from going to Heatherington when any eyes would be upon her, but now she felt it would be different. During that visit of her own and her mother's to Abbot's Court some years before, she had gone to a luncheon in the old house, which had been one of the most trying hours she had ever gone through. The very remembrance of it now was painful, but with the assurance that the Hendersons were absent, she pursued her way towards Heatherington

with a feeling of security, on that soft February day.

The hedgerows were bare and leafless, but plumes of hart's-tongue ferns clustered in the lanes, and two or three little aconites shone out like golden stars from their beds of moss and lichens. There were gentle bleatings of lambs in the field, and the rooks were busy and vociferous, as Christabel drew near Heatherington. The iron gates were closed, and Christabel paused, doubting if she should enter, when a gardener working in the now neatly-kept drive looked up and said, "Fine morning, ma'am."

"May I walk round the garden?" she asked, "and go through the grounds to the cliffs behind?"

"To be sure, ma'am," said the man, civilly, "the family is away, and you can go round by the front of the house if you please."

Christabel smiled her thanks, and went up the drive, stopping now and then to look at all the familiar objects, and to think of days gone by. The lawn was now shaven close, and on one side a number of flower-beds had been cut, while a pretty conservatory opened at the side of the house from the dining-room. The wisteria and clematis were trained and trimmed, and the old sun-dial had no shadowing branches now to hang over its face and hide its motto, which had been re-cut in sharp distinct letters: "SIC VITA FUGIT." The mullions of the windows were

all clear, and the old carvings on the architraves had been restored. Indeed, the whole place bore tokens of the care and prosperity of the owners.

Memories of childhood and youth came thick and fast, and as she went to the side of the lawn and stood under her old elm tree, Christabel's eyes were full of tears as she looked up through the leafless branches to the February sky above, with its soft feathery clouds. Once it had been a favourite dream that they should all come back to Heatherington, and that in the October of her life her mother should have a sweet and chastened reflection of its summer. But that would never be now. Her mother was safe in one of the many mansions of their Father's house, and this earthly home would know her no more. And now Christabel went through the shrubbery to the familiar path to the cliff-house. The view from it was grey and dim to-day, and only faint gleams of sunshine now and then came athwart the sea, and touched the outline of the coast with glory one minute to leave it indistinct and hazy the next. Soft and low the wind of the western sea swept over the waves, and made them murmur their old story on the pebble ridge. Christabel listened for the sound, and knew the music as of old, for to her, in whose ears it was familiar, it could be distinctly heard. The cliff-house had been rebuilt, and was now filled with convenient seats

and tables, and as Christabel entered she saw a child's toy and a story book, which told their own tale that there were now, as in times past, childish visitors to the cliff-house. Christabel sat alone for some time ; she remembered that it was here she had told her mother about St. Aubyn, that it was here she had stood on the morning when his ship had sailed out to the Atlantic. She remembered it all with a deep sadness and sense of disappointment, against which she felt she had now to do battle. It was not for her to sit down idly, and mourn over the broken hope of earth, when the great Hope remained unbroken and secure. Ah ! well may those who can say from their heart, "Thou art my Hope," give thanks. Truly they may be sorrowful, but always rejoicing. Truly their sharpest trials have lost their sting and bitterness, and the question, "Now, Lord, what is my hope?" can meet a ready answer. "Surely my Hope is even in Thee."

Christabel turned from the cliff-house with reluctant steps. In some way she felt as if she were taking a farewell of the past ; that she must 'look no more mournfully upon it, for it would never come back again, but that she must go forth to meet the shadowy future with a faithful trusting heart.'

And even as the half-uttered words had risen to her lips, as the brave spirit girded itself to do battle against selfish and vain regret, he who had

ever held so prominent a place in all her memories stood before her. With the quick instinct of a woman's nature she read St. Aubyn's face at once, just as she had seen doubt and mistrust written there when they had met in Bristol, just as she had seen that there was some change and some barrier between them ; now she read that the cloud was cleared away, and he had come in faith to realize the hope of years ; and that through all the long waiting time he had been unchanged and true. Her nature was ever so perfectly sincere and transparent, that it did not enter into her heart to conceal its joy. When he came up to her, with outstretched hands, she met him with a face so bright and a smile so radiant, that it was almost more than he could bear.

"My San Christobel !" he faltered ; "is it—is it ?"

"Yes," she answered ; "if you will have it so. Your Christabel now and always."

Then St. Aubyn took her hands in his, and bending over them gave God thanks. Nor was he ashamed of the tears which dimmed his eyes—the pure, true eyes, which Mrs. Smith had well likened to a child's, when he looked into Christabel's face, and read there the certainty that she was his—his San Christobel, as she had said now and always.

"Why did you ever doubt me ?" she asked, as they walked through the Heatherington lanes together. "I cannot understand it."

"Everything conspired to make me doubt," he answered. "And, Christabel, what was I that you should remember me for seven long years; that you should wait for me? They told me years ago that you were going to marry Mr. Francis. When I came to England it all seemed as if it must be true. That night—that sad night—you came home with him, I heard his name on all sides as the one who would be your mainstay and support in your trouble. But I confess I had a lingering doubt, and the morning I went away I wrote to you. You did not answer my letter, and so my hope died."

"I never had any letter from you," Christabel said. "I used to think if you would give me the chance I would tell you everything, but you never did."

"Ah!" said St. Aubyn, "that wretched little maid failed in her promise then. If I could be angry with anyone to-day, I should be angry with her. But perhaps it is as well; if she had been faithful to her trust I might never have known what a great noble soul Gilbert Francis has. It was a letter from him which brought me here to-day."

Christabel's colour rose, and her fair sweet face was crimson.

"You will not mind," he continued half anxiously. "I had been so surly and ungracious to the Vicar, to whom I owed so much. I had shrunk from him; I had avoided him; and I

owed him," he repeated, "so much. In the last conversation I had with him, I begged his pardon for repulsing him as I did. Somehow the truth flashed upon him, I scarcely know how, and though I got no letter from you, I got one from him. It brought me to Bristol by the night mail last evening; it brought me here to-day. Are you sorry?"

For Christabel's lips were quivering, and her eyes full of tears. "No, oh no! but indeed, Gilbert Francis is good and true; how true; I never knew till now."

"I have seen your father," St. Aubyn went on, "and Katie, and the twins. I got to Adelaide Square about seven, and saw your father alone."

"What did he say?"

"Everything that was kind; and I appreciate it all the more, knowing that it must be an effort to him to give you to me. I am not worthy."

"How was it you thought of coming to Heatherington first," Christabel asked.

"I felt as if I must; and I came over the hills too. Last time I was here, a few weeks ago, I could not come that way. There are no foxgloves now," he said. "Do you remember how I lashed them with my stick that day?"

"And how I pitied them," she rejoined, "and tried to save them too!"

"I have kept your Bible safely, St. Aubyn," she said, presently; "it has been more to me than tongue can tell! Our mothers have met now in

Paradise." It was the first time she had mentioned that name, or touched upon her great sorrow.

"Our mothers!" It was very sweet to him to hear her speak thus, and the tie between them seemed to grow stronger every moment.

"The memory of your mother will ever be precious to me," St. Aubyn said. "She was always kind to me, and always gentle and tender. I think, Christabel, she would have welcomed me as her son."

"I know she would," said Christabel, earnestly. Then, after a pause, "Perhaps she does welcome you now."

And thus talking over many things of the past, they went slowly on, till the gates of Abbot's Court came in sight.

"Before we part to-day I have one thing more to tell you, which might change your father's feelings as to the future, nay, might even change yours."

She looked up quickly, and a sudden but transient doubt shot through her. What could he mean?

"I went to London," he said, "by the advice of a Bristol oculist, to see a great authority about eyes. My sight has been getting very dim for the last year, and there is a chance, perhaps I ought to say a certainty, that I shall be blind."

"Blind!" she repeated.

"Yes, blind," he said again.

And then, for the first time, Christabel looking

up into the violet eyes, shaded by the thick dark fringe, thought she saw a dimness there.

"This may, perhaps will, hinder me," he went on, "from remaining in the West Indies. I must return there to settle my affairs, and make arrangements for leaving the estates in my young brother's charge. He is nearly as old as I was when I went out to Campinas to earn my bread. He is quite capable of managing my concerns for me ; and it would be useless for me to stay there, blind and helpless."

"I will be your eyes," said Christabel. "I can tell you everything you want to know, and read to you, and——" Her voice failed a little, and she stopped.

"My passage is taken to return to Jamaica on the eighth of March. I had fixed it before I knew what good things were in store for me, and I feel I must adhere to it. It will be very hard to part from you so soon, Christabel, but it must be."

"Must it?" she asked.

"Yes, I must make haste to use what daylight is yet left me to put things in proper order out there, and then, whether I am blind or not, I shall have no anxiety about you, as to your future, if I am taken from you. You remember my old violin, Christabel, and how I resented its ignominious fate. Well, it has had a successor, and I have told it many of my secrets, and it has comforted me in return. I shall always have music as a resource ; and

oh, my darling, if you are my eyes, as you say you will be, how can I complain?"

"Mr. Bowman may be wrong," she said, smiling through her tears, "but if he is right, we will not complain." She stopped a moment, but she was so anxious to feel sure that they should not miss in their united lives one unfailing comfort. It was always difficult to Christabel to speak of the deep current which flowed through her life now, hidden but deep, as it does through many lives at which the world looks, and wonders why they are so fair and pleasant to others when often outward trials seem to bristle up around them. But she felt now as if she must be sure. Putting her hand in his arm, she said, "We have one Hope, St. Aubyn, have we not? One Hope which cannot fail?"

He caught her meaning, and replied, "Yes; one Hope and one Faith, as seeing Him who is invisible."

Christabel walked quietly into the drawing-room at Abbot's Court about one o'clock: only Alice was there. "You are very late, where have you been?" was her sister's question, and when she saw St. Aubyn she gave a little stiff bow in answer to his, as Christabel introduced him.

"St. Aubyn has come from Bristol to-day, Alice; I have asked him to come into luncheon."

Alice opened her large dreamy eyes with astonishment, but she only said, "We shall be glad to see him."

It was a trying and uncomfortable moment for Christabel, but she summoned up her courage, and, seeing that St. Aubyn shrank with the shrinking of a proud, sensitive nature from this chilling reception, she said, "Alice, our father sent St. Aubyn here to-day, or rather gave him his full sanction to come and see me. I hope, for my sake, you will welcome him as a brother."

It was bravely said, and St. Aubyn felt proud and glad and thankful. His San Christobel had not failed him, then! Nor did she when Mr. Adair came grandly into the room, followed by Lena, and responded to his wife's information, that Mr. Beresford had come to luncheon, with a most magnificent bow and the offer of two fingers. But Lady L'Estrange did her best to make up for her father's want of cordiality, for with quick womanly perception she saw how it was, and, going up to St. Aubyn, she said, "Shall you and I go into the dining-room together. You have been in the West Indies, I think. My husband has a brother in Barbadoes. He will be here to-morrow, and will be so much interested to hear about your life there."

During luncheon Mr. Adair patronized St. Aubyn, and discoursed on the price of sugar, the failure of the crops, and the relative merits of free and slave labour. It came to an end at last, and then St. Aubyn took leave of his host and hostess, saying he must be in Bideford again by five o'clock. "I should like to see

you alone before I go," he said in a low tone to Christabel.

And she quickly put on her hat, and said, "I will walk through the plantation with you. You can get into the Northam Road by the gate at the top. May I ask Scott for the key of that gate, Alice?"

"You can ring the bell," Alice said, in the same indifferent tone, "but you will find the plantation very wet to-day, I should think."

The key was brought, and St. Aubyn and Christabel left the room together. They walked through the woods in earnest conversation, and forgot the wet grass and the soft drizzling rain, which was beginning to fall.

"If all goes well I shall be with you again in six months," St. Aubyn said, when the gate at the edge of the plantation was reached. "I dare not say I shall see you again, but your face is written where it can never change or fade, Christabel. Even when I thought I should never possess you I had an intense longing to see you once more, before darkness closed over me. That wish, that prayer, is granted, thank God. Now, I must go and get through a great deal in London and Liverpool before the 1st; but you will write to me, my darling."

"Six months is not so long," she said; "we that have waited seven years can afford to wait six months, can we not?" So she cheered him to the last moment, and so they parted.

Christabel's thoughts, as she retraced her steps, were with her mother and with him. A deep joy lay hid now within her heart, but it was chastened and subdued. It seemed to have its link in heaven, and it made her gentle and forbearing, if not, as in younger days it might have done, exulting and glad. Mr. Adair's shafts were powerless to wound and vex her. He said a great deal in the course of the evening which was contemptuous and sarcastic, and intended to show forth the wide gulf which would be set between the wife of Mr. Adair, of Abbot's Court, and the wife of St. Aubyn Beresford. But Christabel was far beyond feeling any resentment or irritation against him. Perhaps her heart ached a little when Alice said, as they parted for the night, that she thought it a great mistake, and a great pity, it was simply throwing herself away, and it would not be pleasant for her, as lady of Abbot's Court, to hear the remarks which would be made in the neighbourhood about her sister having married the nephew of the Bideford attorney, and the son of a disgraced adventurer. Yes, perhaps her heart ached a little, and the great yearning for her mother's love grew stronger; a yearning which never ceased, and which was often a pain in its intensity. But through all, there was a sense of deep peace and joy, and strangers intermeddled not with it.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONCE MORE.

"An empty sky—a world of heather—
Purple of foxgloves—yellow of broom—
We two among them wading together,
Shaking out honey, treading perfume.

"Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet."

JEAN INGELow.

ONCE more the purple foxgloves nod upon the hill-side, and the bees go humming forth on busy wing. Once more the wild roses look out from the short bushes, and the yellow lady-fingers shine in the sunlight like burnished gold. Once more the fresh Atlantic breezes wander over the Northam hills, and bear upon their breath the sweet scents of the early summer-time and whisper gently as they pass over heather and gorse. The sea makes the old melody as it breaks upon the pebble ridge, and the brown larks rise to the sky to sing their glad song of thanksgiving and

love. Once more the unchanging face of nature smiles its welcome to St. Aubyn Beresford and Christabel, as they stand together where they stood nine years before. Life has brought its changes since that May morning, long ago, when we saw them first. Christabel clings to St. Aubyn's arm now, and imperceptibly guides him as they walk. As they move along she tells him what she sees, of the white ships far out at sea, catching the morning sun upon their sails, of the silvery gleam which shoots across the dark-browed Lundy Island as it stands distinctly defined against the clear sky; of a flock of snowy sea gulls hovering over the sands of the distant coast, and the little villages dotted about on the opposite side of the Torridge. She tells him of all she sees; but he can hear with quicker recognition than hers the music of the waves, the singing of the larks, the bleating sheep, and the cawing rooks—all the countless sounds which palpitate through the air on a summer morning like this. He hears, and she knows that he will make his violin tell it all again, and at some future day weave with it the beauty which she sees, but which is shut out from him for ever.

St. Aubyn is blind; but it is as she said it should be: Christabel sees for him, and few that have their eye-sight are happier than he is. It is some months now since Christabel has been his wife, and a quiet, deep sense of rest has come to her soul.

The West India estate is worked by St. Aubyn's brother, and there is enough for both to share and live upon in comfort. But St. Aubyn does not dream away his time in idleness. Music finds utterance, and Christabel's hand writes down a score of many compositions, which she fondly thinks will one day make her husband's name famous. She reads to him, and is always at his side when he needs her; but she has still time to think of the poor, the sick, and the sorrowful, and to exert her influence in her old home—not in Adelaide Square now.

Mr. Kingscote has allowed the Hendersons to renew the lease of Heatherington, but he has taken Katie to a pretty little country house near Clifton, on the borders of the wide spreading Downs; and here Harold comes from Oxford, and St. Aubyn and Christabel are frequent guests; and here the twins return for the vacation from Rugby, where they are doing as well as Harold did at the Bristol Grammar School long ago. When another term of years has run out, Mr. Kingscote thinks, if his life is spared, that he will return to the home of his ancestors; but not until all doubt about the power of living there in comfort is removed; not till he has realized enough to make it certain that he shall be able to leave Heatherington to his son, free and unencumbered from every embarrassment.

The Vicar of St. Olave's has, with his sister's help, made the parish a model for imitation, and

has organized and kept in action schools and reading-rooms, and libraries for poor people, which were not promoted in those days so generally as now. Those who knew the Vicar well, and knew him in years gone by, find him changed. He is more gentle in his judgments, more tolerant of those who differ from him. Sometimes there may be seen on his face, and heard in his voice, a touch of sadness, and a tone which tells that earth has brought to him as to most of us, disappointment and trial. But at other times his eye kindles, and his countenance is bright with a joy which comes not from any earthly source, as he speaks of a Love beyond and above all other, and a Hope which shall never make ashamed. Bertha, his faithful sister, as she leads her useful, though apparently inactive invalid life in Myrtle Place with Gilbert, often tells herself that she is content, that her wishes for her brother are realized, and that all has been ordered well for him in the past, and will be so ordered in the future ; that future into which no human eye can penetrate, but where we know and are very sure that the Love and Hope which have been sufficient hitherto will not fail.

It is pleasant to take one last look at Christabel as she turns with her husband towards a little cottage nestling among the hills above Bideford, which they have taken for a few weeks, that the first May-time of their married life

may be spent in the place dear to them from early association with each other. They have the neighbourhood all to themselves; Abbot's Court is deserted; for Alice has her desire of a house in London, and the Hendersons are away. The only drawback to Christabel's perfect enjoyment of the old scenes is their near neighbourhood to Marina. But they had just come back from a visit there, which she refused to let St. Aubyn pay without her, as he wished, knowing how painful the effort would be to her. Poor Miss Rachel had seen nothing so pleasant for many a day as Christabel's serene bright face; and she gave her and St. Aubyn a welcome which was pathetic in its sincerity and earnestness. The miserable and tyrannical invalid, now bound hand and foot with his painful malady, was a piteous sight. Christabel forgot to be angry at his covert sneers and ill-concealed jealousy of St. Aubyn. She forgot to be angry when he tried to jest about his blindness, and asked her how she liked the office of guide to a blind man. As her husband answered with temper and forbearance, and tried to draw the conversation from debateable ground to topics which might interest his uncle, Christabel's heart was too full of love and admiration for him to leave room for any unkindly feeling. She thought of the Master's words, and could fancy she almost heard them spoken to St. Aubyn, "Great is your reward in heaven."

When they reached their little nest on the hills, St. Aubyn went in to their sitting-room and Christabel lingered in the porch. The view so familiar to her from her childhood lay stretched before her, and she was gazing at it with loving eyes of appreciation and remembrance.

Presently St. Aubyn began to play, and Christabel turned to listen. The music seemed to gather up all the beauty and all the gladness of nature, and all the love, and trust, and hope, which bound their lives together, and breathe it forth in an anthem of praise and thanksgiving. A faint murmur of a minor chord, pathetic and sad, broke in now and then, only to be swallowed up again by a full burst of melody, dying away at last into the very fulness of quiet and peace.

Christabel could see her husband where she stood ; she caught the outline of his head, and saw the long white fingers passing over the strings of the violin. Suddenly he raised his head, and as the last chords died away into silence, he turned his face full upon her. She saw an expression written there of contentment, which made her heart throb with pleasure ; it was hard, very hard, to believe that those deep blue eyes were sightless.

"How beautiful that is, dearest!" she said. "You must teach me how to write it down for you, that others may hear it too. What shall we call it, St. Aubyn?"

And leaning out to her from the low window-sill, and feeling for her hand, with a bright smile on his face, he said, "We will call it

SAN CHRISTOBEL."

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